

Mass-Elite Linkages in Western Europe and the Role of Partisan Attachments



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Statement of Originality

I certify that the thesis I have presented for examination for the PhD degree of the London School of Economics and Political Science is solely my own work with the exception of chapter four, for which Johann Bauer provided assistance with the formalisation of the spatial model and the simulations that are presented in the appendix. Chapter four has been published at *West European Politics*, and Johann Bauer is listed as a co-author. The copyright of this thesis rests with the author. Quotation from it is permitted, provided that full acknowledgement is made. This thesis may not be reproduced without my prior written consent. I warrant that this authorisation does not, to the best of my belief, infringe the rights of any third party.

I declare that my thesis consists of 55,325 words.

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Abstract

This dissertation explores the moderating role of voters' partisan attachments for our understanding of representative democracy. It addresses two broad questions about the dynamic interplay between parties and different voter groups. First, what explains differences in how distinct voter groups update their political attitudes and perceptions of parties' issue positions? Second, how do parties position themselves to respond effectively to an electorate that consists of distinct voter groups for whom the median voter is not representative?

Finding answers to these questions is important because we currently have a limited understanding of how partisan attachments influence voters' political attitudes and perceptions as well as the strategic behaviour of parties. Using a range of original and existing datasets in the context of Western Europe, I show in three articles that partisan attachments induce motivated reasoning, which not only influences how voters update their political attitudes and perceptions but also affects parties' strategic policy positioning.

The first two articles explore how partisan voter groups update their political attitudes and perceptions of parties' issue positions differently in response to issue salience shocks and the formation of a new coalition government. I first show that issue salience shocks can produce heterogeneous voter responses by inducing partisan motivated reasoning among partisans of the issue-owning party, which subsequently brings these voters ideologically closer to their party. I then show that coalition formation can induce variation in voter responses

by inducing partisan motivated reasoning among partisans of a coalition party, which leads these voters to perceive the coalition parties as adopting more disparate issue positions over time. The findings have important implications for parties' strategic behaviour in election campaigns and throughout the electoral cycle.

The third article shows that accounting for different voter groups helps to explain the effect of abstention on the strategic policy positioning of parties. It argues that parties face a trade-off between mobilising their non-moderate partisans and attracting moderate swing voters via policy appeals. Parties face stronger incentives to target their non-moderate partisans if the threat of abstention among that group is high, but as the threat of abstention declines, parties will increasingly target moderate swing voters instead. An important implication is that abstention motivates parties to adopt more ideologically dispersed positions when voters are polarised and the share of non-moderate partisans is higher. The findings imply that abstention can encourage parties to improve representation of their electoral base. Overall, the thesis contributes to debates on the connection between issue ownership theory and spatial models, the influence of partisan attachments, and the importance of the median voter for parties' strategic policy positioning.

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1 | Introduction

In 2002, nine days before the Dutch parliamentary elections, Pim Fortuyn, who was the leader of his eponymous populist far-right party, was assassinated. As a result of the murder, crime and safety immediately became highly salient to the Dutch public. The campaign was suspended, and although parties and candidates no longer provided voters with new information on their policy platforms, Fortuyn's murder had a remarkable effect on voters' political attitudes and perceptions. In the aftermath of his death, partisan supporters of parties that were tough on crime displayed significantly more conservative attitudes towards redistribution, whereas attitudes among other voters remained stable. In addition, those partisan supporters evaluated their preferred party as more conservative on euthanasia, whereas other voters did not change their perceptions of parties' positions on euthanasia.

The reactions to the murder of Pim Fortuyn in the Netherlands are surprising, and they raise several important questions for political scientists. One relates to the nature of the public's reactions, as the murder does not appear to be directly connected to considerations of redistribution and euthanasia. What then motivated Dutch voters to update their attitudes towards redistribution and their perceptions of parties' positions on euthanasia? A second question concerns the heterogeneity of the public's reactions, as the murder triggered a change in political attitudes and perceptions only among partisan supporters of

certain parties, but not among other voters. What explains the heterogeneity of voter responses to political events? Why do some voters update their political attitudes and perceptions of where parties stand on certain issues, while others do not react? A third question relates to the consequences of voters' heterogeneous reactions for party strategies. If voters react in such diverse ways, how do parties represent public opinion effectively?

1.1 Motivation and Arguments

The example from the Netherlands shows that voters respond to seemingly unrelated political events, and that such reactions differ across partisan groups and non-partisan voters. The reactions of Dutch voters to the murder of Pim Fortuyn clash with our normative views of representative democracy in at least two regards. First, changes in citizens' political attitudes and perceptions of parties' policy positions should be prompted by new and relevant information (Dalton 1985; Sartori 1968). Second, the decision to support a given party should be guided by one's political attitudes and perceptions, and not vice versa. The heterogeneous reactions of Dutch voters also invite us to ask more general questions and draw important lessons about how different voter groups update their political attitudes and perceptions in practice. In this spirit, this dissertation contributes to answering two broad questions about the functioning of representative democracy in Western Europe. *First, what explains differences in how distinct voter groups update their political attitudes and perceptions of parties' issue positions? Second, how do parties position themselves to respond effectively to an electorate that consists of distinct voter groups?*

My answers to these questions focus on the moderating role of partisan attachments. The theoretical starting point of this dissertation is that the

electorate can be divided into distinct groups based on which party voters are attached to, how strong their partisan attachment is, or whether they lack a partisan attachment altogether. An attachment to a political party forms a part of citizens' self-conception and helps voters organise their political attitudes, evaluations and perceptions (Campbell et al. 1960; Wattenberg 1998; Green, Palmquist and Schickler 2002; Dalton and Wattenberg 2002; Gaines et al. 2007). There is already a large body of research on public opinion and political psychology, which emphasises the influence of partisan attachments on political behaviour and outcomes. This literature shows, for example, that voters who identify with a given party tend to be more sympathetic to its leadership and the policy positions that it advocates (assimilation bias), and more opposed to the leaders and policy positions of rival parties (contrast bias) (see Markus and Converse 1979; Jacoby 1988; Bartels 2002; Merrill, Grofman and Adams 2002; Evans and Andersen 2004; Drummond 2011; Wagner, Tarlov and Vivyan 2014). Moreover, partisan voters differ from non-partisan voters not only in how they evaluate their preferred party, but also in how they update their political attitudes, judgements and perceptions. When partisans have to make up their minds about new policy debates or other political controversies, they tend to align their attitudes and judgements with those espoused by their own party (see Carsey and Layman 2007; Gaines et al. 2007; Lenz 2009; Bisgaard 2015). As such, partisanship binds voters to a party and raises a 'perceptual screen' through which voters filter out information that clashes with their party's positions and seek out information that validates their existing partisan ties (Campbell et al. 1960).

This dissertation extends previous work on partisan attachments and representative democracy by analysing the dynamic interplay between parties

and distinct voter groups in different contexts and at various points during the electoral cycle. In a series of three articles, I first explore how voters update their political attitudes and perceptions in response to issue salience shocks. Second, I analyse the role of institutions by examining how coalition participation influences voters' perceptions of policy compromise. Third, I explain how parties position themselves in order to respond to the preferences of different voter groups. I argue that distinguishing voter groups based on their partisan attachments helps to better understand how voters update their political attitudes and perceptions as well as how parties choose their policy positions. For example, I find that partisan attachments moderate voters' responses to issue salience shocks. I also show that partisan attachments and the strength of these attachments help to explain differences in voters' perceptions' of coalition parties' policy compromises over time. Finally, I find that analysing voter groups based on their partisan attachments helps to understand the effect of abstention on parties' strategic policy positioning. When viewing the electorate as consisting of distinct partisan groups that constrain parties, I find that abstention has important implications for how parties strategically position themselves to mobilise, attract and retain different types of voters.

By applying insights from the literature on partisan attachments to puzzling political phenomena, this dissertation not only contributes fresh knowledge to the study of representative democracy in the context of Western Europe; it also aims to provide a general framework for studying the dynamic interplay between parties and different types of voters in other contexts. This framework consists of three steps. First, it involves considering what the salient political identities are that divide the electorate into distinct subgroups. Second, it involves analysing how political events or actions taken by parties are linked

to these group identities and can induce motivated reasoning or cognitive dissonance, thereby triggering heterogeneous responses by the public. Third, it involves thinking about the strategic responses of political parties, which may take into account that such group identities prompt motivated reasoning to varying degrees among voters.

In the following three articles I explain how distinct partisan and non-partisan voter groups update their political perceptions and attitudes differently, and I subsequently explore how such heterogeneous responses affect parties' strategic policy positioning. But voters' political identities in Europe are in flux and can take different forms. Political tribes can, for example, be organised along traditional partisan lines, or they can be structured around salient political events such as Brexit. The current political landscape in the United Kingdom illustrates that the Brexit referendum in 2016 consolidated pre-existing social divisions, such as age or education, into salient Brexit identities, and that these new identities induce motivated reasoning with the same force as partisan attachments (Hobolt, Leeper and Tilley 2018). Dividing the electorate into distinct groups based on Brexit identities would be a useful starting point for gaining a more in-depth understanding of public opinion change, heterogeneity in voter responses as well as parties' strategic behaviour. Future research could explore how changes in partisan groups or how voter groups based on different political identities explain changes in the public's political attitudes and perceptions as well as parties' subsequent responses. I elaborate on opportunities for future research in the conclusion chapter.

One takeaway from my dissertation is that analysing the dynamic interplay between parties and different partisan and non-partisan voter groups produces novel findings and contributes to important debates on representative

democracy. In this dissertation I primarily focus on three debates. The first relates to the links between issue ownership theory and spatial models of electoral behaviour; the second relates to the consequences of coalition formation for the public's perceptions of policy compromise; and the third relates to parties' strategic policy positioning, the role of the median voter and the influence of abstention. As will become evident, my findings differ from previous work mainly because I consider how partisan attachments moderate voter responses, rather than to assume that the electorate follows the same heuristics or responds to information in the same manner.

1.2 Contributions to Debates

Issue Salience Shocks

In the first article of this dissertation I contribute to the debate about the links between issue ownership theory and spatial models of electoral behaviour. I do so by analysing how an issue salience shock influences perceptions of issue proximity – on policy dimensions unrelated to the issue salience shock– between distinct partisan groups and their preferred party. I argue that an issue salience shock induces stronger partisan motivated reasoning among supporters of the party that enjoys a strong reputation on the salient issue (i.e. 'owns' the issue).¹ Stronger partisan motivated reasoning leads these voters to perceive their party as more ideologically proximate on unrelated policy dimensions. I find that on pragmatic or material issues, such as redistribution, voters adopt their party's position as their own. But on principled or social issues, such as euthanasia, voters shift the perceived position of their party towards their own position.

¹Note that issue salience shocks can be engineered by parties or be the result of exogenous events.

In contrast, voters do not update their political attitudes or perceptions of the issue-owning party if they do not have pre-existing partisan attachments to that party.

These behaviours of voters are not explained by existing work on issue ownership theory or spatial models of electoral behaviour, mainly because both theoretical approaches tend to be treated separately (see Green and Hobolt 2008). Issue ownership theory posits that parties primarily compete for votes by emphasising issues on which they enjoy a strong reputation rather than by trying to change voters' issue positions (Petrocic 1996; Petrocic et al. 2003; Belanger and Meguid 2008). Issue ownership therefore does not say much about the effects of issue salience on voters' issue positions or on their perceptions of parties' issue positions, both of which are the main focus of spatial models of electoral behaviour (Downs 1957; Adams, Merrill and Grofman 2005). I connect both theoretical approaches by showing that heightened issue salience can bring voters ideologically closer to the issue-owning party if they have pre-existing partisan attachments to the party. My results emphasise the importance of accounting for differences between partisan groups, as the effects of heightened issue salience are heterogeneous.

The findings are important because they help us understand why some voter groups update their political attitudes and perceptions of their party in response to issue salience shocks, while other voters do not react. By inducing partisan motivated reasoning, issue salience shocks can reduce the importance of issue proximity to party support for certain voter groups. Spatial models of electoral behaviour assume that issue proximity drives party support (Downs 1957), but my findings suggest instead that party support also drives perceptions of issue proximity. This finding implies that parties can pursue different

electoral strategies simultaneously; they can emphasise issues they own to retain or mobilise their own partisan supporters, while at the same time trying to attract support among other voter groups by adopting issue positions that are more congruent with the preferences of these voters.

Coalition Government

A second debate I contribute to in my second article relates to the consequences of coalition formation for the public's perceptions of policy compromises. Given that coalition governments are the norm in most Western European countries, understanding how voters perceive policy compromise by coalition parties is important for scholars of representative democracy as well as for parties contemplating joining a coalition government. The existing literature argues that all voters will update their perceptions of coalition parties' policy positions equally by relying on the so-called coalition heuristic, which is an information shortcut that leads voters to infer a party's policy similarity to another party based on whether or not the parties are in a coalition government (see Fortunato and Stevenson 2013; Fortunato and Adams 2015; Adams, Ezrow and Wlezien 2016). One clear implication of this research is that coalition parties face the risk of being punished at the polls for being publicly perceived as 'selling out' their core principles (Fortunato and Adams 2015; Klüver and Spoon 2019).

In contrast, my findings differ from those of previous work because I compare changes in perceptions of the coalition parties' policy positions over time between groups of voters who are supporters of a coalition party and groups of voters who are not. While I find that voters do indeed rely on the coalition heuristic to update their short-term perceptions of coalition parties' policy positions, longer-term changes in voters' perceptions are heterogeneous

and are moderated by partisan attachments to a coalition party. In the short-term, the coalition heuristic leads all voters to perceive the coalition parties as holding more similar issue positions than before the election. But whereas supporters of a coalition party will update their perceptions of the coalition parties again during later stages of the government's tenure, other voters will not update their perceptions again. Supporters of a coalition party will engage in partisan motivated reasoning and perceive the coalition parties as holding more distinctive issue positions than before the previous election. The tendency to perceive the coalition parties as more ideologically distinctive is greater among stronger partisans of a coalition party. The reason for this is that partisan supporters of a coalition party are more receptive to the parties' communications that are aimed at publicly differentiating their issue positions from those of other cabinet parties.

My findings, which take into account differences across partisan groups over time, run counter to other work that suggests coalition parties will be perceived by all voters as converging towards the same policy positions. While the previous work implies that coalition parties, particularly junior coalition parties, will be punished at the polls for being seen as 'selling out', my findings suggest that this implication is, at least partly, inaccurate. Namely, coalition parties should be primarily concerned about retaining support among swing voters or their weak partisans, while strong partisans are less likely to see their party as 'selling out' their core principles when joining a coalition. Consequently, my findings have clear implications for the electoral strategies of parties that join coalitions.

Strategic Policy Positioning of Parties

My focus on differences between distinct partisan and non-partisan groups also adds to a third debate about representation and the role of the median voter. Much of the existing literature on representation and responsiveness relies on the assumption that all voters employ a proximity-based policy metric to evaluate parties and guide their vote choices. As a consequence, this work examines the conditions under which parties or governments are more congruent with or more responsive to the preferences of the median voter (see Powell and Vanberg 2000; Blais and Bodet 2006; Adams et al. 2006a; Powell 2009; Adams, Haupt and Stoll 2009; Golder and Stramski 2010; Pontusson and Rueda 2010; Ward, Ezrow and Dorussen 2011; Powell 2013; Golder and Lloyd 2014; Lupu, Selios and Warner 2017; Golder and Ferland 2017; Ferland 2018). Yet there is a growing body of research that explores representational biases in favour of certain subgroups, such as high income earners (Gilens 2005; Bartels 2008), business leaders and experts (Jacobs and Page 2005), opinion leaders (Adams and Ezrow 2009), or the highly educated (Soroka and Wlezien 2010). I contribute to this research in my third article by considering how parties position themselves strategically to appeal to an electorate that consists of distinct partisan and non-partisan voter groups. In doing so, I also add to the debate about whether and how abstention influences party positioning.

The main argument of my third article is that parties primarily face a trade-off between mobilising their non-moderate partisan supporters and attracting support among moderate swing voters via policy appeals.² Based on a simple formal model, which is adapted from Merrill and Adams (2002), I show

²Parties also need to retain support among their moderate partisan supporters, but it is assumed that parties always have strong incentives to be more moderate than their median partisan supporter (Schofield 2006).

that parties face incentives to become more ideologically congruent with their non-moderate partisan supporters if voters have a higher propensity to abstain. The reason is that by adopting moderate positions parties will prompt their non-moderate partisan supporters to sit out the election. A higher propensity to abstain means that parties alienate a larger share of their partisan supporters when adopting a moderate position. In contrast, parties face incentives to target moderate swing voters when the propensity to abstain decreases, because parties will then alienate a smaller share of their core constituents when adopting a moderate position.

One important implication of this theoretical argument is that the threat of abstention motivates parties to adopt a wider range of ideological positions if the electorate becomes more ideologically polarised and the share of non-moderate partisans is higher. I argue for this reason that the threat of abstention from alienation can function as a mechanism of accountability that motivates parties to improve representation of their non-moderate partisan supporters. While much of previous work focuses on how abstention fosters unequal representation (Fenzl 2018; Peters and Ensink 2015; Schlozman et al. 2012), I find instead that the threat of abstention can motivate parties to represent a wider range of ideological preferences. My findings are novel and extend traditional spatial models of electoral behaviour, which often assume either that voters have no partisan attachments (see Downs 1957; Alesina 1988; Schofield, Sened and Dixon 1988; Lin, Enelow and Dorussen 1999) or that all voters are partisans (McGann 2002; Adams and Merrill 2003; Adams, Merrill and Grofman 2005; Adams, Dow and Merrill 2006). By emphasising that the electorate consists of partisan and non-partisan voter groups, this dissertation provides novel insights into the effects of abstention on party competition in multiparty systems.

Each of the following three articles of this thesis contributes new knowledge to the study of representative democracy by explaining the mechanisms through which political events induce heterogeneous responses among partisan and non-partisan voters, and how this voter heterogeneity influences the strategic policy positioning of parties. The following sections provide a detailed overview of the arguments, evidence, findings, and contributions of each article.

1.3 Article 1: Issue Salience and Perceived Issue Proximity

In article one, I consider how partisan voters differ from non-partisan voters in how they update their issue preferences and perceptions of where their preferred party stands on these issues. Previous research on political behaviour and psychology has shown that, unlike non-partisan voters, partisan voters are motivated to bring their political preferences and perceptions in line with their preferred party's position to avoid inconsistency with their positive attitudes towards the party (Taber and Lodge 2006; Bolsen, Druckman and Cook 2014). Partisans, for example, perceive their party's issue positions as closer to their own preferences than they actually are (assimilation effect), whereas they perceive rival parties' issue positions as more distant to their own preferences than they actually are (contrast effect). Assimilation and contrast effects are well documented by the political behaviour literature (see Merrill, Grofman and Adams 2001; Drummond 2011). Partisan voters may either align their own issue attitudes with the corresponding positions of their preferred party, which is called persuasion bias, or they may align their perception of the preferred party's issue positions with their own issue attitudes, which is called projection bias.

Although there is a plethora of work on the effects of projection and persuasion on policy issue proximity, there is not enough scholarly attention on the influence that issue salience and issue ownership exert on voters' perceptions and attitudes. This limitation is acknowledged by Neundorf and Adams (2016), who encourage researchers to investigate the relationship between issue salience, on the one hand, and issue attitudes and perceptions, on the other hand. Article one addresses this gap in the literature by demonstrating that a rise in issue salience brings voters closer to the party that 'owns', or has a strong reputation on, the issue insofar as they already sympathise with the party. If an issue becomes more salient, supporters of the party that 'owns' the issue will develop a stronger affinity towards that party. As a consequence, those partisan supporters will either align their issue attitudes with their party's issue positions (persuasion bias), or they will bring their perceptions of their party's issue positions in line with their own issue attitudes (projection bias). Whether individuals adjust their own issue preferences or their perception of the party's position depends on the issue domain. On principled or social issues, voters' preferences are driven by ethical considerations and are therefore more fixed. On pragmatic or material issues, however, voters' preferences tend to be driven by material considerations and are therefore more malleable.

In contrast to partisan supporters of the issue-owning party, other voters are not expected to react to the change in issue salience and will hence not update their issue attitudes and perceptions. Moreover, voters who support a party that does not enjoy a strong reputation on the salient issue will also not update their issue preferences and perceptions of their party's issue positions. The article thus describes a novel causal mechanism through which issue salience affects voters' issue attitudes and perceptions of where the preferred party stands

on these issues; a party's 'ownership' of a salient issue induces a strengthening of party affinity among its supporters, but not among other voters (Pardos-Prado, Lancee and Sagarzazu 2014). Following the partisanship literature, a strengthening of party affinity induces voters to adapt their issue attitudes or perceptions in order to achieve consistency with one's affinity towards the party and the positions the party advocates.

I find strong evidence for these arguments by examining voters' reactions to Pim Fortuyn's murder, which occurred only nine days before the 2002 Dutch elections and in the midst of fieldwork of the Dutch parliamentary election study. The murder raised the salience of crime and safety, which should have benefited right-leaning parties that are considered to be issue owners of crime. The murder led to greater affinity towards right-leaning parties among their supporters, who subsequently displayed stronger agreement with their parties on different policy issues. Specifically, voters aligned their own attitudes towards redistribution with their party's position on that issue, whereas voters aligned their perception of their party's position on euthanasia with their own attitudes towards euthanasia.

Article one has several important implications for the study of representation and party competition. It extends previous research that emphasises partisan bias in voters' issue preferences and perceptions of parties' issue positions. It does so by showing that partisan perceptual bias is influenced by whether the preferred party 'owns' a salient issue. Issue ownership theory assumes that all voters react similarly to changes in issue salience, whereas this article demonstrates that reactions are heterogeneous across voter groups. Moreover, the article demonstrates that the effect of issue salience is not constrained to party support, but that it extends to political attitudes and perceptions of parties'

issue positions. This finding is novel because it uncovers a relationship between issue salience and issue positions. In contrast, previous work has predominantly treated the issue-ownership approach, which emphasises issue salience, on the one hand, and the Downsian approach, which emphasises issue positions, on the other hand, as separate and competing (see Green and Hobolt 2008). Finally, the article suggests that partisan perceptual bias differs across issue domains. On pragmatic or material issues, voters are more likely to bring their own positions in line with that of their party. On principled or ethical issues, however, voters are more likely to bring their perception of their party's position in line with their own position.

An important implication of the findings is that dramatic political events can induce partisan motivated reasoning and thereby affect how voters update opinions and perceptions. Such events risk that political decision-making is based more on partisan attachments than on relevant information and substantive arguments. The findings should also be of interest to scholars of party competition and representation because they suggest that the dependence of issue positions from issue salience has been underestimated. A broader implication of the findings is that seemingly unrelated political events affect how voters form beliefs and opinions.

1.4 Article 2: Partisan Motivated Reasoning and Perceptions of Coalition Parties

The second article analyses how voters track the policy positions of parties that join coalition governments. The article responds to a growing body of research that examines how voters infer parties' policy positions on the basis of governing coalition arrangements. This literature reports evidence that voters rely on the

coalition-based heuristic to update their perceptions of parties' policy positions. According to this view, parties signal to the electorate that they are willing to engage in wide-ranging policy compromise when they agree to enter into a coalition government, and consequently voters will perceive the coalition parties as converging on more similar policy positions.

Fortunato and Stevenson (2013), for example, find that voters perceive coalition parties as more ideologically similar than other parties and more than the left-right tone of their manifesto would suggest (see also Falco-Gimeno and Munoz 2017). Moreover, Adams, Ezrow and Wlezien (2016) show that the effects of the coalition-based heuristic can be extended beyond perceptions of left-right ideology to the issue of European integration. Related work finds that voters' reliance on the coalition heuristic is particularly biased against junior coalition parties, which are perceived as less influential and more willing to compromise on policy than the prime minister's party (Fortunato and Adams 2015). As a result, voters are expected to infer the policy positions of junior coalition parties on the basis of the policy position of the prime ministers' party.

That voters rely on governing coalition arrangements to infer parties' policy positions has important implications. One is that the coalition heuristic influences voters' perceptions such that they diverge significantly from the actual content of parties' manifestos or from party placements by experts (Adams, Ezrow and Wlezien 2015). The easily observable fact of governing in a coalition can therefore induce perceptual bias among politically inattentive voter groups, whereas politically attentive voter groups rely on more wide-ranging sources of information, such as election manifestos, party leaders' speeches and interviews, and parliamentary debates. A second implication discussed by Adams, Ezrow and Wlezien (2015) is that voters' perceptual bias, which is caused by

their reliance on coalition heuristics, prompts mass-level partisan sorting. This means that party supporters adapt their own political attitudes on the basis of perceived shifts in their preferred party's issue positions. A third implication highlighted by the existing literature on coalition heuristics is that parties face strong disincentives to join a coalition as a junior cabinet party, because doing so risks being seen by voters as weak and 'selling out' one's core principles. In support, Klüver and Spoon (2019) argue that joining a coalition government as a junior partner hurts a party's subsequent electoral success because the party cannot differentiate itself from the prime minister's party.

The finding that voters rely on the coalition-based heuristic to guide their perceptions of coalition parties' positions raises important questions. These questions relate to previous work reporting evidence that coalition parties invest considerable resources to publicly differentiate their policy positions from their coalition partners via speeches, parliamentary debates, legislative amendments and press releases (Martin and Vanberg 2008, Sagarzazu and Klüver 2017; Fortunato 2019). If voters exclusively relied on the coalition-based heuristic and ignored coalition parties' countervailing messages, then why would parties invest time and money into disseminating such messages? Why would parties choose to join a coalition (as a junior cabinet partner) if they expected to be unable to reduce voters' reliance on the coalition-based heuristic?

While the coalition-based heuristic has important implications for the study of representative democracy, previous studies have been too quick to assume that all voters rely equally and exclusively on the coalition-based heuristic when inferring parties' policy positions. My second article challenges this voter homogeneity assumption and examines how voters' reliance on the coalition-based heuristic is moderated by two factors: partisanship and attention to pol-

itics. Regarding the role of partisanship, extant work from political psychology and public opinion finds that voters often engage in motivated reasoning and process information in a biased manner so as not to contradict their pre-existing positive beliefs about their party (Taber and Lodge 2006). Partisan supporters are therefore more likely to believe that their party is influential and will not ‘flip flop’ on its policy promises when entering a coalition government. Additionally, partisan supporters of a coalition party will attach more weight to the coalition parties’ differentiation messages than other voters, who rely more strongly on the coalition-based heuristic.

One reason for this is that partisan motivated reasoning prompts voters to judge their own party as a more credible source of political information than other parties. Another reason is that partisan attachments function as a social identity that creates a motivational need for positive distinctiveness (Huddy and Bankert 2017; Greene 1999). A key empirical expectation that follows is that over time supporters of a coalition party will perceive the coalition parties as adopting more different policy positions (effect of differentiation messages), whereas other voters will perceive the coalition parties as adopting more similar policy positions (effect of coalition heuristic).

Partisan motivated reasoning thus makes supporters of a coalition party more receptive to the coalition parties’ differentiation messages. But not all voters are equally likely to receive the coalition parties’ messages because political communication is more likely to reach voters who are more attentive to politics. My second argument is therefore that politically attentive voters will perceive the policy differences between coalition parties as greater than less politically attentive voters. Moreover, attention to politics should magnify the effect of partisan motivated reasoning on voters’ perceptions of the coalition

parties' positions.

The coalition government between the British Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats between 2010 and 2015 provides an excellent case for testing these expectations. Namely, the coalition was not anticipated and therefore voters did not already factor policy compromise into their perceptions of the coalition parties' issue positions. That makes it easier to identify the causal effect of coalition participation, compared to situations in which voters' perceptions are pre-treated because voters are more familiar with coalitions.

A second reason for why the coalition between the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats is a good case for testing my arguments is the availability of cross-sectional and panel data with large sample sizes and a focus on different issue dimensions. By examining how voters' update their perceptions of the coalition parties' positions on multiple policy issues, my third article extends previous work that has focused mainly on left-right ideology.³

I find strong empirical support for my arguments. The findings suggest that voters' reliance on the coalition-based heuristic is short-lived and that in the longer-term voters' perceptions of the coalition parties are moderated by partisanship and attention to politics. Voters who identify with a coalition party perceive the coalition parties as adopting more different issue positions than before cabinet formation, while other voters are less receptive to parties' messages and hence do not update their perceptions. Moreover, I find that the stronger the voters' identification with a coalition party the more they will perceive the coalition parties as differentiating their issue positions. Finally, I find that politically attentive voters perceive the coalition parties as adopting more different issue positions, particularly if they are attached to a coalition

³A notable exception is a study by Adams, Ezrow and Wlezien (2016) which shows that the effects of the coalition-based heuristic can be extended to the European integration issue.

party. In contrast, voters do not update their perceptions of the coalition parties' positions if voters are not attentive to politics, irrespective of whether or not they identify with a coalition party.

The findings call into question some of the implications highlighted by existing research on the coalition-based heuristic. Contrary to previous research, the findings imply that coalition parties can successfully differentiate themselves in the eye of the public and thereby present voters with clear policy alternatives. It does therefore not follow that junior coalition parties cannot sufficiently differentiate themselves while in office and should therefore not join a coalition. Instead, I show that the risks of being drawn into the policy shadow of the prime ministers' party are significantly reduced when the electorate is attentive to politics and when coalition parties have a strong partisan base that will be receptive to the parties' differentiation messages.

Finally, the findings of the second article contribute to the overarching question of this dissertation by explaining how parties can often trigger heterogeneous responses among voters. I challenge previous work that assumes all voters rely equally on the coalition-based heuristic by showing that coalition participation triggers heterogeneous responses among voters depending on their partisanship and attention to politics.

1.5 Article 3: Party Extremism, Voter Polarisation and Abstention

In article three, I consider how parties strategically adjust their programmatic positions if the electorate consists of loyal partisan supporters and non-partisan swing voters. Spatial models of party competition typically assume that the electorate is homogeneous insofar as all voters rely on the same proximity-based

metric to guide their vote choice or insofar as all voters exhibit similar partisan biases (Adams 2016), so this article adopts a novel approach. My theoretical framework posits that vote-seeking parties choose their programmatic positions not only to persuade voters but also, and perhaps more importantly, to ensure that loyal partisan voters turn out (Adams and Merrill 2003). Voters may abstain due to alienation when no party sufficiently represents their ideological preferences. By implication, parties can mobilise voters via policy appeals, a finding that is backed up by ample empirical evidence (Lefkofridi, Giger and Gallego 2014; Brockington 2009; Wessels and Schmitt 2008; Thurner and Eu-mann 2000; Plane and Gershtenson 2004; Adams, Dow and Merrill 2006).

According to this framework, parties face a trade-off between representing their partisan supporters, who are loyal to their party but who abstain if they become alienated, or to compete with other parties for the uncertain support of swing voters, who display no partisan loyalty and who also may abstain due to alienation. This trade-off is influenced by how likely voters are to abstain across loyal partisan and swing voter groups. If voters have a high likelihood to turn out in support of their parties, parties can simultaneously target swing voters via policy appeals and retain support among their loyal partisans. In contrast, if voters have a lower likelihood to turn out, parties risk alienating their partisan supporters when targeting swing voters instead. I therefore argue that parties increasingly target moderate swing voters when they expect that doing so will not lead to substantial abstention from alienation among their partisan supporters. If the threat of abstention among partisan supporters is low, parties will thus adopt moderate positions even when partisan supporters have more ideologically extreme preferences. In contrast, parties will adopt more extreme positions in response to partisan supporters having more ideologically

extreme preferences if moderate party positioning would risk alienating a large share of partisan supporters.

Based on this theoretical argument, I predict that parties adopt more extreme positions when the electorate becomes more ideologically polarised, but only if parties fear that adopting centrist positions instead will lead to abstention. If voters have a low propensity to abstain, however, parties are less likely to adopt extreme positions in response to voters becoming more ideologically polarised. An empirical analysis of parties' programmatic left-right positions in eleven Western European countries between 1977 and 2016 provides strong evidence in support of my arguments. I find that party positions are more extreme when the electorate was more ideologically polarised in the previous election, but the effect weakens as abstention decreases. When abstention is below 25 per cent, parties no longer adopt more extreme positions in response to voters becoming more ideologically polarised.

The article departs from the standard Downsian perspective of voters who follow the same proximity-based metric to guide their vote choice and who display no partisan loyalties. According to this type of spatial model, voters' preferences are normally distributed along an ideological left-right dimension, and parties choose ideological positions on this left-right dimension to maximise their vote share. Moreover, voters are assumed to have accurate perceptions of parties' positions and vote for the party with the closest ideological distance to their preferred position. Several variants of the Downsian spatial model exist that adapt assumptions, for example, about how many parties compete, whether parties only care about maximising their vote share, whether parties are unified, what electoral system is in place, how many policy dimensions matter, or whether voters look no further than the next election (for a more

comprehensive summary, see Grofman 2004).

Article three builds on more recent developments in the study of party competition that integrate partisanship into spatial models. Theories of partisanship argue that voters who display partisan attachments towards a given party do not follow the same proximity-based metric advocated by Downsian models. Instead, partisans are loyal to their party even if a rival party advocates more similar views. Moreover, partisans tend to perceive their preferred party in a favourable way, while exaggerating differences to other parties (Merrill, Groman, Adams 2002; Drummond 2011). One example of how partisanship is integrated into spatial models of party competition is Merrill and Adams (2002), who study how strategic party positioning changes when all voters display partisan attachments. The authors develop a formal theoretical model which predicts that as voters' partisan attachments grow stronger, parties increasingly shift their policy positions towards their partisans' preferences. The authors reason that parties are able to gain more votes from their own partisan supporters via policy appeals than they can gain from supporters of rival parties via similar policy appeals.

Consistent with Downs' (1957) arguments, Merrill and Adams (2002) argue that parties will adopt more extreme positions when (partisan) voters become more ideologically polarised. Adams et al. (2004; Ezrow 2007; Adams, Green and Milazzo 2012) validate these theoretical insights empirically by presenting evidence that changes in party polarisation correlate with changes in voters' ideological polarisation. Other work by Dalton (2008; Adams, de Vries and Leiter 2012), however, presents more limited evidence of a positive correlation. My article extends the theoretical work of Merrill and Adams (2002) by relaxing the assumptions that all voters have partisan attachments and that all

voters turn out. The assumption of full turnout is empirically unjustified, and it also prevents us from understanding the effects of abstention on party strategies. In this regard, Adams, Merrill and Grofman (2005) argue that strategic party positioning is not only aimed at persuading voters but also at mobilising alienated partisan supporters. Similarly, Cox (2010) suggests that by focusing on the role of persuasion, studies of party competition have predominantly overlooked the role of mobilisation. Consistent with this view, other empirical research has also shown that parties' policy appeals have a mobilising effect.

The assumption that all voters have partisan attachments also fails to acknowledge that parties often face a trade-off between targeting their loyal partisan supporters and non-partisan swing voters. Redistributive models of party competition acknowledge this trade-off, whereas spatial models of party competition, which focus on how parties adjust their policy positions, do not (Cox and McCubbins 1986; Dixit and Londregan 1996; Cox 2010). My theoretical framework aims to explain how this trade-off affects party positioning and how the trade-off is influenced by voters' propensity to abstain. The predictions that emerge from this analysis differ from the ones of previous theoretical research in one important aspect; while Merrill and Adams (2002) argue that parties adopt more extreme positions as the electorate becomes more ideologically polarised, I argue that the effect is conditional on voters' propensity to abstain. This finding offers a positive outlook for representative democracy. Much of previous scholarship focuses on how abstention fosters unequal representation (Schlozman, Verba and Brady 2012; Peters and Ensink 2015; Fenzl 2018), while the findings presented in article three suggest that the threat of abstention can motivate parties to represent a wider range of ideological preferences.

1.6 Methodology and Data

The thesis tests the theoretical arguments that I develop in each article using a variety of statistical methods and data sources. In article one, I leverage a natural experiment to make causal inferences about the heterogeneous effect of a rise in issue salience on voters' issue attitudes and perceptions of party positions. I estimate the causal effects on voters' issue attitudes and their perceptions of party positions using the seemingly unrelated regression equations (SURE) estimator (Zellner 1962). This estimator is superior to a simple equation-by-equation analysis, which would produce inefficient estimates because voters' issue attitudes and perceptions of party positions are linearly dependent. Using generalised least squares, the SURE estimates multiple equations jointly and exploits the correlated error terms between different equations to yield more precise estimates.

The empirical analysis relies on Dutch parliamentary election studies from 1998 and 2002, in which over 2,000 respondents indicate their levels of support for a variety of policy issues and place parties on the same scale for each policy issue. The murder of Pim Fortuyn occurred in the midst of data collection and therefore enables us to compare attitudes and perceptions between respondents interviewed before the murder (control group) and respondents interviewed after the murder (treatment group). I apply coarsened exact matching (CME) to the data to eliminate imbalances in the covariate distributions of the treated and the control groups (Iacus, King and Porro 2011). CEM is a powerful, nonparametric data preprocessing method that reduces model dependence and statistical bias in parametric causal inference (Ho et al. 2007). These properties make CEM superior to other parametric and nonparametric

methods for addressing imbalances.

In article two, I rely on panel and cross-sectional data from the British Election Study (BES) to explain voters' short-term and long-term responses to coalition formation. I first estimate fixed-effects models to show how voters update their perceptions of parties' issue positions immediately after these parties form a coalition government. I then examine how voters update their perceptions of coalition parties' issue positions in the longer term by comparing perceptions of different voter groups before coalition formation and during later stages of the parliamentary term. Finally, I compare voters' perceptions of the coalition parties' issue positions with their own issue preferences in order to explore whether changes in voters' perceptions are driven by assimilation or contrast effects. One major benefit of using BES survey data is that I am able to examine how individuals track the positions of coalition parties on multiple issue dimensions (i.e. redistribution, crime and European integration), which is a strength over previous research that mainly focuses on the left-right ideological dimension. Another benefit of using BES data is that the surveys include a sufficiently large number of respondents (ranging between over 3,000 and over 20,000) to explore how different voter groups, such as partisans of a coalition party, change perceptions over time.

In article three, I estimate pooled and unpooled time-series cross-sectional models to describe the effects of voter polarisation on parties' programmatic positions in eleven Western European countries between 1977 and 2017. I employ several techniques to address common issues related to serial correlation, omitted variable bias, and contemporaneous correlation across panels. The empirical analysis combines data on voters' ideological preferences and parties' programmatic positions, as well as party system features and turnout.

Data on voters' ideological preferences is based on Eurobarometer surveys, which ask approximately 1,000 respondents from each country each year on where they would place themselves on a left-right ideological scale from one to ten, where higher values indicate more right-wing preferences. Parties' programmatic positions are measured on the same left-right ideological scale based on their election manifestos, which are coded by the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP) (Volkens et al. 2017). The CMP provides a useful longitudinal and cross-sectional measure of parties' policy positions that is widely used in research on party representation (see Adams et al. 2004; Ezrow 2007; Jansen, Evans and de Graaf 2013; Adams, Ezrow and Somer-Topcu 2014; Adams, Ezrow and Wlezien 2016). Using parties' election manifestos, the CMP identifies what proportion of quasi-sentences can be allocated to each of the 54 policy areas that are identified. Left-right scores are then measured as the difference in percentages of right statements from the percentages of left statements, divided by the total number of statements. The definition of left and right statements was developed by Laver and Budge (1992) who use within-country factor analysis of a range of coding categories that load consistently at the opposite ends of the underlying dimension. The CMP left-right measure has been found to be consistent with those utilised by other party positioning studies, such as expert placements, voters' perceptions of party positions or parliamentary voting of party members, which strengthens confidence in the reliability of the CMP measure (Hearl 2001; Laver, Benoit and Garry 2003; McDonald and Mendes 2001).

1.7 Conclusion

The thesis makes several contributions to the study of representation and party competition. It first argues that previous research relies too heavily on simplistic assumptions about voter homogeneity. In a series of three articles, it then explores the consequences of the heterogeneous responses among partisan and non-partisan voters from the bottom-up and the top-down perspectives. By integrating partisanship into existing theories of representation and party competition, the thesis reports several novel findings with important implications for the study of representative democracy. These findings highlight that accounting for different voter groups provides a better understanding of how voters form and update their political attitudes and perceptions, and how parties strategically adjust their programmatic positions.

The findings of the thesis also prompt a discussion about the normative functions that partisan attachments fulfil in representative democracies. The public's attachment to political parties is often taken as a measure of the quality of representative democracy, insofar as it assesses the degree to which parties mobilise and integrate voters into the democratic process (Dalton 2002). The findings presented in this thesis, however, offer a mixed view on the consequences of party attachments. On the one hand, party attachments encourage partisan motivated reasoning, which results in biased attitudes and perceptions. The quality of representative democracy suffers as a consequence, as voters are ill-suited to hold incumbent parties to account if they have distorted views of parties' policy positions and performance (see also Lavine, Johnston and Steenbergen 2012). Having distorted views of where parties stand and what the policy status quo is also reduces the likelihood that voters actually elect parties which

implement the desired policies (Jerit 2009).

Taking a top-down perspective, article one highlights the risk that dramatic political events reinforce partisan divisions by inducing partisan voters to align their political attitudes more strongly with their (perception of the) preferred party. An important implication of this finding is that parties are able to engineer closer issue agreement with their partisans, not by changing their policy platforms, but merely by emphasising salient issues that they own (see also van der Brug 2004). In a similar vein, the second article shows that governing coalition arrangements reinforce polarised perceptions of parties' policy positions among partisan and non-partisan voters, which may further deepen partisan divisions.

While partisan attachments potentially undermine representative democracy, as I have emphasised in the first two articles, article three suggests that they may also help to hold governing parties to account. Taking a bottom-up perspective, the article argues that partisan attachments encourage parties to be responsive to their supporters' ideological preferences lest they abstain from voting. One important implication of this is that parties represent a wider range of policy alternatives when the electorate becomes more ideologically polarised, which scholars have argued is normatively desirable (Cox 1997; Andrews and Money 2009; Ezrow 2007). When the public's attachments to parties become eroded, however, parties face weaker incentives to represent the diversity of voter preferences (Merrill and Adams 2002; Ezrow 2007). On balance then, the thesis finds that party attachments can help lower standards of democratic citizenship, while at the same time holding parties accountable to the public. I discuss these points in more detail in the conclusion chapter.

2 | Issue Salience and Perceived Issue Proximity Between Voters and their Preferred Party

Abstract

Voters tend to exaggerate how strongly their political preferences agree with their favoured party's positions. While previous research on the sources of perceived issue proximity emphasises partisan attachments, much less is known about the role of issue salience. This article argues that an increase in issue salience brings voters ideologically closer to the issue-owning party, but only if they already support the party. Higher issue salience induces partisan motivated reasoning among supporters of the issue-owning party and thereby increases the issue proximity between the issue-owning party and its supporters. The argument is supported by a quasi-experiment that leverages the sudden increase in the salience of crime and safety after the murder of a Dutch politician during the 2002 election campaign. The findings are of interest to scholars of representative democracy because they underscore the combined relevance of issue salience and

partisan attachments for understanding how voters update political opinions and perceptions.

2.1 Introduction

Voters tend to exaggerate the degree to which their issue preferences agree with their favoured party's positions. The greater voters' affinity is for a given party, the more they will exaggerate their perceived issue proximity with that party. The influence of this type of partisan motivated reasoning is well documented in studies using long-term panel data, particularly in the context of the United States (Markus and Converse 1979; Merrill, Grofman and Adams 2001; Bartels 2002; Evans and Andersen 2004; Goren 2005; Carsey and Layman 2007; Lenz 2009). Much less is known, however, about what prompts voters to engage in partisan motivated reasoning and exaggerate the perceived issue proximity with their party. This article leverages a natural experiment from the 2002 Dutch election campaign to explain the influence of issue salience and issue ownership on voters' perceptions of issue proximity.

The main argument is that an increase in issue salience induces greater partisan motivated reasoning among supporters of the issue-owning parties, which subsequently translates into greater issue proximity between the issue-owning parties and their supporters. Consistent with issue ownership theory, an increase in issue salience reinforces voters' affinity for the party that is well regarded on or 'owns' the issue, particularly if they already support the party (van der Brug 2004; Bélanger and Meguid 2008; Smith 2010; Pardos-Prado, Lancee and Sagarzazu 2014; Green and Jennings 2017). By reinforcing voters' affinity for the issue-owning party, an increase in issue salience can thus prompt voters to engage in partisan motivated reasoning and perceive the party as more proximate on multiple issue dimensions. I argue that the mechanism by which an increase in issue salience leads to greater issue proximity between the

issue-owning parties and their supporters is domain-specific. On pragmatic or economic policy domains, voters adopt their preferred party's positions as their own. On principled or social issue domains, however, voters project their own position onto their preferred party.

I test these arguments empirically by utilising quasi-experimental data from the 2002 Dutch parliamentary election study (DPES), which was interrupted by the assassination of the eponymous leader of the right-wing populist party, Pim Fortuyn List. The murder raised voters' salience of crime and safety but did not provide new or relevant informative cues about parties' policy positions, as the election campaign was immediately suspended. From a rational choice perspective, voters should therefore not have updated their perceptions of party positions or their own issue preferences, particularly on issue dimensions that are unrelated to Fortuyn's murder.

Despite the absence of informative cues, I find that the murder increased the issue proximity between right-leaning parties, which have issue ownership of crime policy, and their supporters on two issue dimensions. On a pragmatic or economic issue (e.g. redistribution), voters adopted their preferred party's position as their own. On a principled or social policy issue (e.g. euthanasia), voters did not change their own position but instead projected their position onto their preferred party. The perceived ideological proximity between parties without ownership of crime policy and their supporters was mostly unaffected, except that voters became more sympathetic to Fortuyn and his policies after his assassination (Dinas, Hartman and van Spanje 2016).¹ The effects are robust

¹Dinas, Hartman and van Spanje (2016) use the same case study to demonstrate that Fortuyn's death elicited an emotional response among voters, which caused them to become more sympathetic to his policies. While this study also utilises Fortuyn's death to study perceptual bias, it differs insofar as the focus lies on the effect of issue salience on the perceived issue proximity between parties, which have ownership of crime policy, and their supporters.

to several checks and do not appear to be confounded by party-switching.

The contribution of this article to previous research is threefold. First, the findings should be of interest to scholars of party competition and representation because they show that issue positions and issue salience are intimately related. The relationship between issue positions and issue salience remains underexplored because issue positions are traditionally the domain of spatial models of voting, while issue salience is the focus of issue ownership theory (see Green and Hobolt 2008; Neundorff and Adams 2018). This article addresses the need to examine the reciprocal effects of citizens' issue salience and issue positions. By combining elements of spatial models and the issue ownership approach, the article explains that an increase in issue salience can induce partisan motivated reasoning and bring supporters of the issue-owning party ideologically closer to their party.

Second, I show that the mechanism by which an increase in issue salience brings voters closer to their preferred party is domain-specific. Voters increase the issue proximity to their preferred party by adopting their party's position on pragmatic issues and by projecting their own position onto their party on principled issues. While existing work reports evidence that voters adopt their party's position or project their position onto their party, this article offers a novel explanation of how voters increase the proximity to their party on different types of issues (see Markus and Converse 1979; Granberg, Kasmer and Nanneman 1988; Bartels 2002; Goren 2005; Carsey and Layman 2007; Lenz 2009; Broockman and Butler 2015).

Third, an important implication of the findings is that dramatic political events can induce partisan motivated reasoning and thereby affect how voters update opinions and perceptions. Such events risk that political decision-

making is based more on partisan attachments than on relevant information and substantive arguments. A shock to the salience of an issue may not only exacerbate voter polarisation but it may also undermine the degree to which voters feel represented by the party system.

2.2 Theoretical Motivation and Arguments

Considerable academic research demonstrates that partisan attachments influence voters' issue positions and perceptions of where parties stand on these issues (see Campbell et al. 1960; Merrill, Grofman and Adams 2001; Bartels 2002; Green, Palmquist and Schickler 2002; Evans and Andersen 2004; Goren 2005; Carsey and Layman 2006; Lenz 2009; Tomz and van Houweling 2009). According to this perspective, voters perceive the issue proximity to a party as greater if they already have an affinity for that party, and this type of partisan motivated reasoning is greater when party affinity is stronger (Jacoby 1988; Evans and Andersen 2004). Yet we know relatively little about what prompts voters to engage in stronger partisan motivated reasoning and perceive their party as more proximate. This article argues that issue salience is an important source of perceived issue proximity because it induces greater partisan motivated reasoning among supporters of the issue-owning parties.

The relationship between voters' issue salience and perceptions of issue proximity with parties has so far received little scholarly attention. A notable exception is Lenz (2009), who presents evidence that voters become more likely to adopt their preferred party' positions on issues that are not salient (see also Carsey and Layman 2006). In a similar vein, van der Brug (2004) argues that parties can influence how voters perceive their positions by selectively emphasising salient issues. However, most studies on the sources of perceived issue

proximity to parties either do not consider the role of issue salience or implicitly dismiss its influence on issue positions. In related work, Neundorf and Adams (2018) report a strong correlation between issue salience and parties' perceived positions, and hence they encourage future research to explore the causal mechanisms underlying this relationship. This article takes up the important task of examining the relationship between issue salience and perceived issue proximity by leveraging a key insight from issue ownership theory. Namely, an increase in issue salience can reinforce voters' affinity for the party that 'owns' the issue, particularly if they already support the party (Pardos-Prado, Lancee and Sagarzazu 2014; Lachat 2014; Bélanger and Meguid 2008).

According to issue ownership theory, voters evaluate parties who 'own' salient issues more positively because they have a long-standing association with and are often perceived as more competent on these issues (Petrocik 1996; Sides 2006; Bélanger and Meguid 2008). Issue ownership consists of an associative and a competence-based dimension. Perceptions of which party is most competent at handling an issue vary strongly with voters' pre-existing party affinity (Walgrave, Lefevere and Tresch 2014; Stubager and Slothuus 2013). In contrast, voters tend to have similar perceptions of associative issue ownership, which develops from a party's persistent commitment to prioritising an issue with government spending and lawmaking (Walgrave, Lefevere and Tresch 2012; Tresch, Lefevere and Walgrave 2015). Stubager (2018) explains that having associative ownership of an issue does not in itself constitute a reason for voters to perceive a party more favourably, unless they also agree with the party's proposed policy solution and evaluate the party as competent on that issue.

A rise in the salience of an issue should therefore reinforce voters' affinity for the issue-owning party, but only among its supporters who agree with

the party's proposed policy solutions and view the party as most competent on that issue (Petrocik 1996; van der Brug 2004; Walgrave, Lefevere and Tresch 2012). Pardos-Prado, Lancee and Sagarzazu (2014) test this assumption in the context of Germany and find that heightened salience of immigration strengthened voters' affinity for the centre-right party owning the immigration issue, but the effect is strongest among existing supporters of the issue-owning party. An exogenous shock to the salience of a certain issue may thus strengthen voters' affinity for the issue-owning party and induce greater partisan motivated reasoning, particularly if they already prefer the party.

That heightened issue salience reinforces voters' affinity for the issue-owning party is relevant because party affinity causes partisan motivated reasoning and affects perceptions of issue proximity (Judd, Kenny and Krosnick 1983; Krosnick 1990; Blais et al. 2001; Merrill, Grofman and Adams 2001; Dinas, Hartman and van Spanje 2016). Insights from cognitive psychology help to explain why voters exaggerate the issue proximity to their preferred party, as individuals tend to adjust their perceptions to validate their prior attitudes, beliefs, behaviour, or identity that challenge those perceptions (Festinger 1957; Aronson, Fried and Stone 1991; Egan, Santos and Bloom 2007). Voters are hence motivated to exaggerate the perceived issue proximity with a party they support or identify with (Lodge and Taber 2013; Gaines et al. 2007; Leeper and Slothuus 2014). The motivation to perceive their party as more proximate becomes stronger when voters display stronger affinity for their preferred party, as more strongly held attitudes have a greater effect on subsequent behaviour and perceptions than weakly held attitudes (Fishbein and Ajzen 1975; Lodge and Taber 2013; Petty and Krosnick 2014). I therefore expect that an increase in issue salience induces greater partisan motivated reasoning among support-

ers of the issue-owning parties, which translates into greater perceived issue proximity.

H1: An increase in issue salience brings voters closer to their preferred party (on less salient issue dimensions), but only if the party has ownership of the issue.

Persuasion and Projection Effects

In a second step, I examine the mechanism by which heightened issue salience increases the issue proximity between the issue-owning parties and their supporters. The literature attributes changes in perceived issue proximity to two mechanisms. Most studies argue that voters increase the issue proximity to their party as the result of persuasion, whereby voters adopt their party's position as their own (Bartels 2002; Goren 2005; Carsey and Layman 2007; Lenz 2009). Others point to projection effects and argue that voters shift the perceived position of their party towards their own position (Markus and Converse 1979; Granberg, Kasmer and Nanneman 1988; Tomz and van Houweling 2009; Pappageorgiou 2010). But we know little about the conditions under which voters engage either in persuasion or in projection. Adding to the discussion, I argue that the mechanism by which voters become ideologically more proximate to their party is likely to be domain-specific.

Previous research makes a qualitative distinction between policy issues that are primarily interpreted in principled or in pragmatic terms. For example, Domke, Shah and Wackman (1998) and Shah, Domke and Wackman (1996) find that individuals apply different heuristics when forming political opinions and perceptions depending on whether a policy issue is primarily interpreted in principled or in pragmatic terms. In support, Tavits (2007) reports evidence that

voters reward parties for policy shifts in the pragmatic issue domain, whereas voters punish parties for shifts in the principled issue domain. Tavits (2007) posits that issues are pragmatic if they primarily concern economic policy outcomes or matters of personal self-interest (e.g. redistribution), whereas issues are principled if they are interpreted in ethical terms and relate to religious morals or personal principles (e.g. euthanasia, gay marriage, abortion).

The distinction between principled and pragmatic issues can be useful for explaining how voters update their perceptions of the issue proximity with their party. On principled issues, voters' policy preferences tend to be stable and dominate other considerations, as ethical values are closely linked to an individual's identity. On pragmatic issues, however, voters' policy preferences are not as strongly linked to their identity, which is why compromise and trade-offs are more likely (Domke, Shah and Wackman 1998). Voters are therefore expected to update the ideological proximity to their party by adopting their party's positions on pragmatic issues and by projecting their position onto their party on principled issues.

H2a: On pragmatic issues, voters increase the issue proximity to their party by adopting their party's positions.

H2b: On principled issues, voters increase the issue proximity to their party by projecting their position onto their party.

2.3 Identification Strategy

Identifying the causal effect of heightened issue salience on the perceived issue proximity between parties and their supporters requires two broad conditions to be met. The first requirement is an exogenous shock to the salience of a policy

issue for which at least one party has associative ownership. It ensures that the increase in issue salience is not strategically induced by the issue-owning parties but is instead the result of an unexpected and exogenous event. The increase in issue salience should be exogenous because when parties strategically emphasise a certain issue, they invariably provide voters with informative cues on the issue and their policy positions. Such informative cues help voters learn about parties' positions and update their perceptions of the issue proximity with their party (Lenz 2009; Walgrave and Lefevere 2013). But when the information environment is altered we are unable to determine whether heightened issue salience affects voters' perceptions of issue proximity via partisan motivated reasoning (i.e. uninformative updating) or informative cues (i.e. informative updating). Informative cues may counteract the effects of partisan motivated reasoning, which is why it is important to examine the effects of partisan motivated reasoning in the absence of informative cues.

Although existing work has focused predominantly on party-induced changes in issue salience (see Budge 1982; Budge and Farlie 1983; Petrocik 1996; Green and Hobolt 2008), there are many instances of exogenous changes in issue salience. Recent studies, for example, report evidence that the salience of an issue was affected by events such as humanitarian or refugee crises, terror attacks, high-profile sexual assaults, environmental disasters, corruption scandals, assassinations, and exposure to LGBT content (Czymara and Schmidt-Catran 2017; Ares and Hernández 2017; van der Brug 2001; Finseraas, Jakobsson and Kotsadam 2011; Bishin et al. 2016). These examples highlight the need to understand how exogenous shocks to issue salience influence voters' political attitudes and perceptions independently of informative cues.

The second requirement to identifying the effect of heightened issue

saliency is that the issue saliency shock occurs during the fieldwork of a survey which asks respondents about their issue preferences and their perceptions of parties' positions. Of course, knowledge of respondents' issue preferences and their perceptions of where parties stand on these issues is necessary to estimate how the average perceived issue proximity between voters and their party changes after an increase in issue saliency. The date on which respondents are surveyed should be chosen in a random or pseudo-random manner so that respondents who are surveyed before the issue saliency shock do not systematically differ from those who are surveyed afterwards. If the groups of respondents who are interviewed before and after the issue saliency shock are balanced, potential changes in the average perceived issue proximity can be attributed to the change in issue saliency.

Heightened issue saliency after Pim Fortuyn's murder: A natural experiment

The murder of a Dutch politician during the pre-electoral wave of the 2002 Dutch parliamentary election study (DPES) provides an exogenous issue saliency shock that enables me to estimate the effect of heightened issue saliency on the perceived ideological proximity between voters and their party. In the midst of the data collection period Pim Fortuyn, who was the leader of the rising far-right party List Pim Fortuyn (LPF), was assassinated. The murder occurred only nine days before the election and led to the immediate suspension of all campaign activities. Fortuyn's party, which was founded only a few months before the election, was widely anticipated to win support among dissatisfied voters and to shake up electoral politics (van Holsteyn and Irwin 2003). Indeed the incumbent coalition government, which consisted of the Labour Party (PvdA),

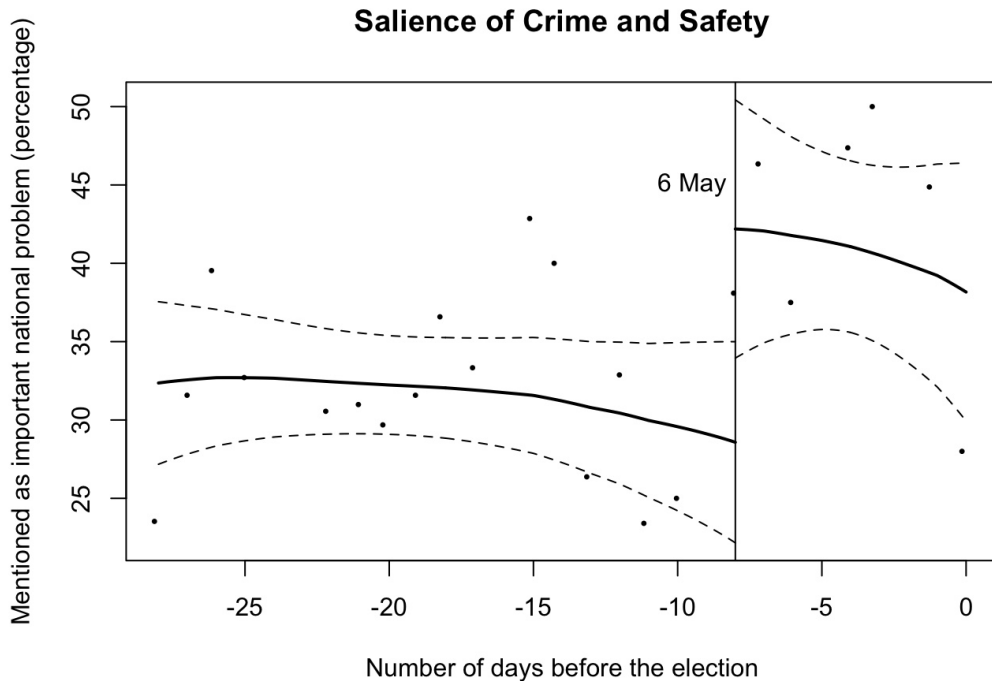
the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD), and the Democrats 66 (D66) suffered major electoral losses, whereas the Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA) and the LPF came out as the winners of the election.

The dramatic and unexpected assassination of Fortuyn represents a natural experiment for four reasons. First, it led to an exogenous shock to the salience of crime and safety. Figure 2.1 provides a graphical representation of the effect that Fortuyn's murder had on the salience of issues related to crime and safety. The vertical axis displays the percentage of respondents who mentioned crime and safety as an important national problem. The horizontal axis displays the days before the election, with the vertical line marking the day after Fortuyn's assassination. Local regression lines were fitted on either side of the threshold. The plot shows a jump of more than ten percentage points in the salience of crime and safety immediately after the murder. Moreover, I show in the appendix that the rise in the salience of crime and safety is not driven by voters supporting right-leaning parties, as the magnitude of the effect is similar across the electorate. I repeat the analysis for different issues and show in the appendix that the assassination only influenced the salience of crime and safety, and that other issues this article focuses on, such as euthanasia and redistribution, were not salient in the election campaign.

2.4 Treatment Effect on Perceived Issue Proximity

The jump in the salience of crime and safety should have benefited right-wing parties such as the VVD, the CDA and the LPF, which are traditionally most strongly associated with crime policy (Aardal and van Wijnen 2005; Green-Pedersen 2007; Stubager and Slothuus 2013; Smith 2010; Dolezal et al. 2014).

Figure 2.1: The salience of crime and safety before and after Fortuyn’s murder



Note: The graphs displays the percentage of respondents who mentioned crime and safety as an important national problem before and after the murder of Pim Fortuyn (6 May 2002). Local regression lines were fitted on either side of the threshold, and 95 per cent confidence intervals are displayed by the dashed lines.

Table 2.1 presents findings from the 1998 DPES that emphasise right-leaning parties’ status as issue owners of crime in the Netherlands. On average, voters are almost twice as likely to associate right-leaning parties (VVD and CDA) with fighting crime compared to other parties (PvdA, D66, and GreenLeft). Moreover, Bélanger and Aarts (2006) explain that the LPF’s popularity during the 2002 election campaign was in large part due to its strong emphasis on tackling crime as well as its radical positions on multiculturalism and asylum seekers (see also van der Brug 2003; van Holsteyn and Irwin 2003).

While the 2002 DPES did not ask respondents to judge parties’ compe-

Table 2.1: Associative issue ownership of crime in the 1998 DPES

CDA	25.5%
VVD	31.2%
PvdA	17.2%
D66	12.2%
GL	14.1%

Note: Associative issue ownership is measured by the percentage of respondents who think the party attaches great importance to crime.

tence at handling crime, there is evidence to suggest that right-leaning parties are evaluated more positively on crime policy by their supporters than by other voters. Table 2.2 highlights that prior to Fortuyn’s murder right-leaning parties represented their supporters more closely on crime than other voters. The perceived ideological distance on crime policy ranges from zero to six, whereby higher values denote lower ideological proximity on a given issue. The rise in the salience of crime and safety that resulted from Fortuyn’s murder should therefore only induce greater partisan motivated reasoning among supporters of right-wing parties. Voters supporting parties that do not enjoy a strong reputation on fighting crime, such as the left-leaning PvdA or the D66, are not expected to react to the murder.

Table 2.2: Perceived distance on crime to issue-owning parties

	<u>VVD</u>		<u>LPF</u>		<u>CDA</u>	
	Supporters	Others	Supporters	Others	Supporters	Others
Mean	0.82	0.96	0.44	0.73	0.97	1.02
SD	1.40	1.24	1.27	1.24	1.33	1.21
p-value	0.000		0.000		0.000	

Note: P-values are based on two-tailed difference in means tests that compare the perceived distance on crime to the issue-owning parties between the parties’ own supporters and other voters prior to Fortuyn’s murder.

The second reason for why Fortuyn's assassination represents a natural experiment is that it led to the immediate suspension of the election campaign and therefore ensured that parties could not provide voters with new or relevant informative cues about their issue positions. In this regard, Pantti and Wieten (2005) find that media coverage of Fortuyn's death consisted almost exclusively of emotional responses, whereas the political character of the murder or its potential consequences were not discussed. From a rational choice perspective, voters should therefore not have updated their perceptions of party positions or their own issue preferences, particularly on issue dimensions that are unrelated to Fortuyn's murder.

On redistribution and euthanasia, for example, voters' preferences and perceptions are unrelated to Fortuyn's murder, and consequently any changes in the average perceived ideological proximity on redistribution and euthanasia will be the result of partisan motivated reasoning (i.e. uninformative updating). In contrast, the assassination, which was motivated by Fortuyn's anti-immigration policies, is likely to have provided voters with informative cues on immigration and crime. It will therefore be impossible to disentangle the effects of partisan motivated reasoning and informative cues on the average perceived issue proximity on crime and immigration.

The third reason for why the events leading up to the 2002 Dutch elections resemble a natural experiment is that the assassination on 6 May represents an exogenous shock that is as good as randomly assigned to a subgroup of a representative sample of the electorate. Some respondents of the pre-electoral survey from the DPES were interviewed before the assassination (i.e. the treatment), while others were interviewed afterwards. Although the DPES 2002 is based on a random sample of the population, the day on which respondents

were interviewed was not chosen randomly. Means difference tests in table 2.3 reveal, however, that respondents in the pre-treatment and post-treatment groups are similar in all characteristics, except for age and urbanisation. Voters from rural areas and older voters are slightly overrepresented in the group of respondents interviewed after Fortuyn’s death. Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests also confirm that the distributions between the pre-treatment and post-treatment groups are balanced, except for age and urbanisation. I also provide evidence in the appendix that non-responses to party placement questions did not differ significantly across treatment and control groups.

Table 2.3: Balance statistics

	Mean diff	p-value	D-statistic	KS p-value	N
Urbanisation	0.190	0.008	0.095	0.005	1,907
Region	0.015	0.766	0.062	0.159	1,907
Social Class	0.020	0.725	0.017	1.000	1,886
Employment Sector	0.09	0.852	0.015	1.000	1,147
Income	0.171	0.429	0.039	0.773	1,662
Political Interest	0.003	0.955	0.019	1.000	1,907
Age	2.566	0.004	0.119	0.000	1,907
Turnout	0.009	0.396	0.009	1.000	1,906
Education	0.061	0.696	0.049	0.397	1,904
Religion	0.049	0.073	0.027	0.936	1,904
Sex	0.018	0.512	0.018	1.000	1,907

Note: The mean differences are the differences between pre-treatment and post-treatment groups with a corresponding p-value, the D-statistic is the largest difference between the distribution functions, and the KS p-value is from the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test.

Fourth, the rise in the salience of crime and safety did not induce respondents to shift their support to the issue-owning parties, which would otherwise confound the effect of heightened issue salience on the perceived proximity between voters and their preferred party. In support, Pardos-Prado, Lancee and Sagarzazu (2014) find no evidence that heightened issue salience increases the

likelihood that voters switch towards the issue-owning party, and other research also suggests that partisan attachments are insulated from short-term forces (Cowden and McDermott 2000; Green, Palmquist and Schickler 2002). I show in the appendix that voters did not become more likely to support a right-leaning party if they were exposed to Fortuyn's murder and if they had similar positions on crime. Moreover, a comparison of average vote shares for different parties before and after the assassination in the appendix reveals no significant differences, although the LPF appears to have increased its vote share by three per cent.

2.5 Data and Empirical Operationalisation

The 2002 DPES is an ideal source for estimating the effect of heightened issue salience because Fortuyn's assassination on 6 May 2002 occurred only nine days before the election and during the fieldwork of the pre-electoral survey. Some respondents were interviewed about various political opinions and perceptions of party positions before the assassination, while others were interviewed afterwards. Of all respondents interviewed during the pre-electoral wave of the survey ($N = 1,907$) 1,436 voters reported a party preference, of which 252 voters indicated support for the VVD, 222 voters preferred the LPF, and 436 voters said they supported the CDA in the upcoming election. Approximately, 75 per cent of VVD, LPF, and CDA supporters were surveyed before Fortuyn's death, and 25 per cent after. Of the 541 voters who identified with left-leaning parties, 80 per cent were interviewed before the murder, and 20 per cent after.

The main dependent variables are the perceived issue proximity between voters and their preferred party on redistribution, euthanasia, crime and immigration. The variables are created by taking the absolute distance between

respondents' own positions and their placements of their preferred party. For all four issue dimensions, respondents' preferences are scaled from one to seven, whereby higher values denote that respondents prefer that "income differences should be decreased", "euthanasia should be allowed", "the government should act tougher on crime", or that "as many asylum seekers as possible should be sent back". Respondents were also asked to place parties on the same scale. Perceived party positions are available for the VVD, the LPF, the CDA, the PvdA and the D66. The survey did not ask respondents to place smaller parties, such as the GL, the SP and the CU.

One main independent variable is a dummy variable that indicates whether respondents are supporters of a right-wing or a left-wing party, while the second independent variable is a dummy variable that indicates whether respondents were surveyed before or after the assassination (i.e. the treatment). A respondent is considered a supporter of a given party if he or she indicates adherence to that party, is a member of that party, or intends to vote for that party in the upcoming election. Respondents who say they are adherents of more than one party are excluded from the analysis. The analysis also includes several control variables, and I describe in more detail in the appendix how these variables are operationalised.

2.6 Analysis and Findings

I first apply coarsened exact matching (CEM) to the data to achieve greater balance between the pre-treatment and post-treatment groups with regard to age and urbanisation (Iacus, King and Porro 2011). This approach first categorises respondents into a set of strata, whereby respondents within each stratum have

the same coarsened values for the matching variables (i.e. age and urbanisation). It then eliminates all respondents from the sample that do not have an exact match in a given stratum. Finally, each respondent is assigned a weight to account for imbalances in the number of respondents from the pre-treatment and post-treatment groups in each stratum. The sample average treatment effect on the treated (SATT) is then estimated either by a weighted difference in means test between the pre-treatment and post-treatment groups or by a weighted linear regression. CEM is a powerful method of eliminating imbalances in the data for the difference in means and all other properties of the covariate distributions (Iacus, King and Porro 2011), and it is superior to other matching methods in its ability to reduce model dependence and statistical bias (Ho et al. 2007).

To test the first hypothesis, I estimate the sample average treatment effect on the treated (SATT) with an interaction between the post-treatment variable and a variable indicating partisan alignment. Right-wing partisans who received the treatment are expected to perceive their preferred party as less ideologically distant, particularly on issues that are unrelated to Fortuyn's murder (i.e. redistribution and euthanasia). In contrast, left-wing partisans who received the treatment are not expected to perceive the issue distance to their preferred party as smaller. Three models are estimated for each issue dimension, but I only present the full models with control variables in the main text. The models include control variables to obtain more efficient estimates. Models without control variables are presented in the appendix.

The second hypothesis states that the mechanism by which voters update their perceptions of the issue proximity with their party depends on the issue domain. On principled issues, such as euthanasia, voters are expected to align

the perceived position of their party with their own position. On pragmatic issues, such as redistribution, voters are expected to adopt their party's position as their own. An equation-by-equation analysis is likely to produce inefficient estimates because voters' issue positions and their perceived party positions are linearly dependent. To account for the correlated errors between equations, Zellner (1962) proposed a seemingly unrelated regression (SUR) estimator. Using generalised least squares, SUR estimates multiple equations jointly and exploits the correlated error terms between different equations to yield more precise estimates. I therefore test the second hypothesis by examining how supporters of the issue-owning parties changed their positions and perceptions of their party's positions on redistribution and euthanasia using the SUR estimator.

The Effect of Higher Issue Salience on the Perceived Issue Proximity

Table 2.4 presents results from the regressions, using weights from CEM to reduce imbalances in the data for age and urbanisation. The interaction term and post-treatment variables that measure the treatment effect are negative and statistically significant in the first two models, suggesting that the perceived issue distance on redistribution and euthanasia decreased for right-wing voters who were exposed to the murder. The treatment led to a 0.291 decrease in the perceived distance on redistribution among right-wing partisans. Given that issue distance is measured on a scale from zero to six, an estimate of -0.291 represents a decrease of four per cent. Although the perceived issue distance is measured on a scale from zero to six, most observations have values ranging from only zero to three. In relative terms the treatment effect is therefore likely to be larger, representing a decrease of seven per cent. Consistent with expectations

the estimated causal effect on left-wing partisans is not statistically significant in any model.

Estimates of the causal effect on the perceived issue distance are similar for euthanasia. The treatment led to a 0.281 decrease in the perceived distance on euthanasia between right-wing partisans and their party, but left-wing partisans did not update their preferences or perceptions of where their party stands on euthanasia. The findings give support to my first hypothesis, particularly because the effect of the heightened salience of crime and safety is consistent across redistribution and euthanasia, which are both unrelated to Fortuyn's assassination. Because respondents did not receive any information on these issues which would justify informative updating, the observed change in the perceived distance between right-wing partisans and their supporters on redistribution and euthanasia can be attributed to partisan motivated reasoning. To facilitate interpretation of the findings, figure 2.2 presents comparisons of the estimated treatment effects between different voter groups for each issue dimension.

As suggested above, the jump in the salience of crime and safety did not have a statistically significant effect on respondents' perceived distance to their party on crime and immigration. Because both issues are closely related to Fortuyn's murder it is likely that respondents received informative cues about these issues and their party's positions on the issues. Given that the effects of informative updating and partisan motivated reasoning may interact with or counteract each other, it is unsurprising that the treatment effects on crime and immigration are not statistically significant.

The robustness of the findings is tested in several ways. First, I examine the possibility that the increase in the salience of crime and safety moved right-wing partisans closer to their party on crime and that this effect spilled over into

Table 2.4: The effect of exposure to Fortuyn's murder on perceived issue distance

	DV: issue distance to the preferred party			
	Unrelated to treatment		Related to treatment	
	Redistribution	Euthanasia	Crime	Immigration
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Post-treatment	0.022 (0.128)	0.075 (0.571)	-0.067 (0.118)	-0.208* (0.122)
Right-wing partisan	0.399*** (0.143)	0.811*** (0.185)	-0.368*** (0.103)	-0.098 (0.134)
Distance on crime	0.064 (0.047)	0.299*** (0.070)		0.203*** (0.051)
Post-treatment x Right-wing partisan	-0.312** (0.157)	-0.356** (0.181)	-0.017 (0.142)	0.164 (0.149)
Distance on crime x Right-wing partisan	0.021 (0.070)	-0.010 (0.092)		0.010 (0.072)
Intercept	0.989*** (0.152)	1.090*** (0.132)	1.229*** (0.099)	1.323** (0.184)
SATT: right-wing partisan	-0.291*** (0.092)	-0.281** (0.123)	-0.084 (0.077)	-0.044 (0.084)
SATT: left-wing partisan	0.022 (0.128)	0.075 (0.132)	-0.067 (0.118)	-0.208* (0.122)
Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓
R-squared	0.05	0.11	0.03	0.09
Observations	1,056	1,189	1,099	1,208

Note: Results are from OLS regressions with robust standard errors in parentheses. CEM is applied to the data to eliminate imbalances for age and urbanisation. All models control for previous vote choice, education and gender, while model 1 also controls for income.

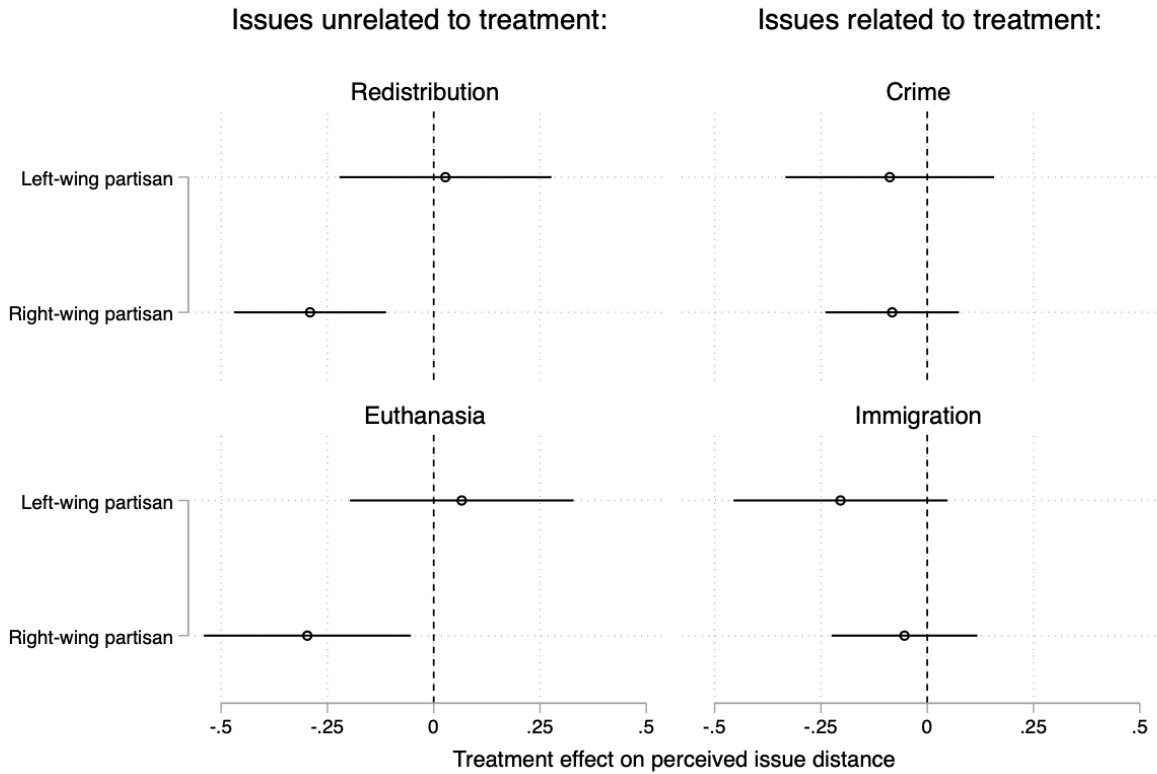
*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

other issue dimensions. There is little evidence, however, for this concern insofar as the interaction terms between respondents' distance to their party and the post-treatment variable is not statistically significant in any model. Second, I present results of models without control variables in the appendix and show that the treatment effects on right-wing partisans are similar. Third, I estimate a new model for each issue dimension after excluding the LPF from the analysis to ensure that the findings are not driven by voters' emotional responses to Fortuyn's death. The regression tables, which can be found in the appendix, show that the findings are robust to these concerns.

While the findings depend on right-leaning parties 'owning' crime, there is no evidence to suggest that they also depend on right-leaning parties 'owning' redistribution or euthanasia. I show in the appendix that the main right- and left-leaning parties do not differ in how much importance they attach to the issue. Equally, Green-Pedersen (2007) finds that no Dutch party mentioned euthanasia more than once in their 2002 election manifesto, and he explains that particularly the CDA tried to de-politicise euthanasia in an effort to escape the religious vs. secular party conflict. Another potential concern about the interpretation of the findings is that voters are perhaps less able to identify the objective issue positions of right-leaning parties compared to left-leaning parties. However, voters may respond to heightened issue salience by perceiving the subjective issue positions of their party as closer to their own position, even if they have no knowledge of their party's objective positions. I also show in the appendix that voters were indeed not less able to identify the issue positions of right-leaning parties.²

²There was less agreement among respondents on where to place the LPF on redistribution, which is explained by the fact that the party was founded only a few months before the election. Nevertheless, the results presented in figure 2.2 are robust when excluding the LPF from the analysis.

Figure 2.2: The effect of exposure to Fortuyn’s murder on perceived issue distance



Note: The coefficients represent the estimated effect of exposure to Fortuyn’s murder on the perceived issue distance to the preferred party. Coefficients denoted by a circle come from regressions 2 and 5 from table 2.4. Horizontal lines denote 95 per cent confidence intervals.

Estimating Projection and Persuasion Effects

The second hypothesis states that the mechanism whereby respondents update their perceptions of the ideological proximity with their party is domain-specific. The existing literature discusses two mechanisms. Some studies argue that voters update their perceived ideological proximity with their party as the result of persuasion, whereby voters shift their own policy position towards their party (Bartels 2002; Goren 2005; Carsey and Layman 2007; Lenz 2009). Others point to projection effects and argue that voters shift their perceptions of their

preferred party's position towards their own position (Markus and Converse 1979; Granberg, Kasmer and Nanneman 1988; Tomz and van Houweling 2009; Papageorgiou 2010). But we know little about the conditions under which voters engage either in persuasion or in projection.

Adding to the discussion, I examine whether projection occurs predominantly in relation to principled issue domains, whereas persuasion tends to occur in relation to pragmatic issue domains. Projection effects are expected to dominate on principled issues such as euthanasia insofar as voters' preferences are fixed but their perceptions of party positions are not. In contrast, persuasion effects are expected to dominate on pragmatic issues such as redistribution because voters' preferences tend to be more malleable. Given, however, that this study examines projection and persuasion effects only on two issue dimensions, future research should explore the usefulness of the principled and pragmatic distinction for a wider range of issues.

Results from the seemingly unrelated regression models (SUR) in table 2.5 provide strong support for the argument that persuasion and projection effects are differentiated by issue domain. On redistribution, changes in the perceived issue proximity are primarily the result of persuasion. The estimate of the treatment effect on voters' own position is statistically significant and negative, which indicates that right-wing partisans increased their opposition to redistribution. Because the treatment has no significant effect on voters' perceived party positions, projection cannot explain the increase in the issue proximity between right-wing partisans and their supporters on redistribution.

On euthanasia the reverse is the case. The estimate of the treatment effect on voters' stances on euthanasia is close to zero and not statistically significant. In contrast the treatment had a strong and statistically significant

Table 2.5: Estimating persuasion and projection effects among the treatment group

	Redistribution		Euthanasia	
	Voters' positions	Perceived party positions	Voters' positions	Perceived party positions
Post-treatment	-0.230** (0.111)	-0.053 (0.113)	-0.014 (0.146)	-0.283** (0.119)
Intercept	4.813*** (0.354)	3.799*** (0.226)	5.874*** (0.461)	2.157*** (0.357)
Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓
R-squared	0.07	0.02	0.06	0.03
Observations	836	836	825	825
X-squared (1df) of independence	243.347 (p = 0.000)		31.373 (p = 0.000)	

Note: Table entries are estimates based on seemingly unrelated regression models. Breusch-Pagan test statistics for the independence of two equations are presented in the last row.

*** p < 0.01, ** p < 0.05, * p < 0.1

effect on voters' perceived party positions on euthanasia, which indicates that projection occurred. Right-wing partisans shifted their perceptions of their party's position on euthanasia (projection), while shifting their own positions on redistribution towards their party (persuasion).

2.7 Discussion and Conclusion

The results show that voters perceive the issue proximity to their preferred party as greater when the party has ownership of a salient issue. Changes in the perceived issue proximity are driven by persuasion or projection, depending on whether the issue is principled or pragmatic. Pim Fortuyn's murder, which occurred during the fieldwork of the 2002 DPES, enabled me to test my arguments through a quasi-experimental design. Following issue ownership theory (Bélanger and Meguid 2008; Pardos-Prado, Lancee and Sagarzazu 2014), I

argued that the increase in the salience of crime and safety induced greater partisan motivated reasoning among supporters of the issue-owning parties, which subsequently brought these voters ideologically closer to their party. To support this argument, I first presented evidence that right-leaning parties are most strongly associated with crime policy and agree most strongly with their supporters on crime than on any other issue, whereas left-leaning parties are less strongly associated with crime policy and agree less with their supporters on crime than on other issues.

I then tested whether the increase in the salience of crime and safety induced partisan motivated reasoning by bringing supporters of right-wing parties ideologically closer to their party. The findings suggests that right-wing partisans perceived the issue proximity to their party as greater on redistribution and euthanasia because of the increased salience of crime and safety. The effect is substantial, particularly because rational or informative updating cannot plausibly explain the change in perceived proximity on these issues; voters received no new information on parties' positions on redistribution or euthanasia, and there is no direct link between heightened concerns over crime and observed changes in voters' perceived ideological proximity on redistribution and euthanasia.

The article contributes to the literature in three regards. First, I leverage a natural experiment to show that heightened issue salience can affect voters' perceptions of issue proximity with their party by inducing greater partisan motivated reasoning. Rational or informative updating is no credible alternative explanation because I focus on the effects on policy issues for which voters did not receive any informative cues by the parties or the media. The findings are relevant to the study of representation and scholars of party competition. Spatial models assume that parties compete for votes by representing voters'

positions, but they have paid little attention to the connection between issue salience and ideological proximity between voters and parties. This study emphasises the relevance of issue salience to spatial models by demonstrating that perceptions of issue proximity are influenced by whether or not a party has ownership of salient issues. Voters perceive their preferred party as more proximate if the party has ownership of a salient issue. Scholars of party competition should therefore acknowledge that the perceived issue proximity between voters and parties is influenced by issue ownership and salience.

Second, the article adds to the debate on whether voters become ideologically more proximate to their party by means of persuasion or projection. While existing research posits that voters tend to rely on their party's policy judgements to determine their own positions (see Broockman and Butler 2015), I argued that persuasion and projection effects are domain-specific. Persuasion is more likely to occur in relation to pragmatic and economic issues such as redistribution, whereas projection should primarily occur in relation to principled and social issues such as euthanasia. Although not always clear-cut, the distinction between principled and pragmatic issues advances our understanding of when voters engage either in projection or in persuasion. Further research is needed to assess projection and persuasion effects for other issues, such as health care or the environment, which are more ambiguous and can be framed in both principled and pragmatic terms.

The finding that persuasion and projection effects are domain-specific has important implications for representative democracy. Given that mass-elite linkages revolve around parties' responsiveness to public opinion, a party persuading its supporters to shift their issue positions is qualitatively different from convincing its supporters to shift their perceptions of the party. For when

voters shift their issue positions in their preferred party's direction, the distance to all parties in the system is affected. But when voters shift their perceptions of their preferred party, only the distance to that single party changes. Persuasion effects may thus improve representation by the preferred party, but this may come at the expense of worse representation by other parties. In contrast, projection effects only affects representation by the preferred party.

Third, the findings provide evidence that dramatic political events can induce partisan motivated reasoning and thereby influence how voters form political opinions and perceptions of parties' positions on unrelated issues. Yet representative democracy depends to a large degree on voters' ability to update their political opinions and perceptions in an informed manner. The findings are troubling because they show that shocks to issue salience can insulate political decision-making from informed consideration and substantive arguments, which may also exacerbate voter polarisation.

The results presented here have several limitations. The study is based on a relatively small sample size and a unique election. Although the strength of the research design is partly derived from the exceptional events leading up to the 2002 Dutch election, future research should test the robustness of the findings across different political contexts with different treatments and larger sample sizes. Given that this study parses out short-term and emotion-based causes of a change in perceptions of issue proximity, we should also be cautious when extrapolating the findings to the long-term causal processes analysed in previous studies that use panel data. Nevertheless, issue salience should be considered an important source for shaping voters' short-term policy orientations and perceptions of issue proximity, even in the absence of informative cues by parties or the media.

3 | Coalition Parties' Perceived Issue Positions: The Influence of Partisan Motivated Reasoning and Political Attention

Abstract

This article investigates how voters track the policy positions of coalition parties. While recent research posits that coalition parties try to maintain a distinct policy profile, a growing literature suggests that their ability to differentiate their positions is limited. This article argues that voters initially perceive coalition parties as holding more similar positions, but that coalition parties gradually succeed in communicating their policy differences to their supporters. Supporters of a coalition party engage in partisan motivated reasoning whereby they perceive policy differences between the coalition parties as greater the stronger their partisan attachments are and the more attention they pay to politics. An empirical analysis of the 2010 coalition between the British Conservative Party and the Liberal Democrats provides support for this argument. Contrary to

previous research, the findings imply that coalition parties can differentiate themselves in the eye of the public and thereby present voters with clear policy alternatives.

3.1 Introduction

Coalition parties face the dilemma of having to balance the need for policy compromise and cabinet unity with the need to emphasise their own policy positions to succeed in elections. Because coalition parties often advocate different policies in their election manifestos, agreeing to wide-ranging policy compromise is necessary to pass legislation and to ensure cabinet stability. At the same time, parties risk losing votes in subsequent elections if they are seen to have diluted their public profile and abandoned their principles (Adams, Ezrow and Wlezien 2016). In response, previous work shows that coalition parties regularly communicate their individual policy positions and priorities to the public in an effort to differentiate their profiles from their coalition partners (Martin and Vanberg 2008; Fortunato 2018; Sagarzazu and Klüver 2017; Bernardi and Adams 2019).

Yet a growing literature suggests that voters may not be receptive to parties' attempts to differentiate themselves from their coalition partners. Fortunato and Stevenson (2013), for example, argue that voters pay little attention to party messages and instead update their perceptions of parties' ideological positions based on governing coalition arrangements, which serve as a heuristic. The authors posit that voters interpret coalition participation as a commitment by the coalition parties to engage in broad-ranging policy compromise, which in turn prompts voters to perceive the coalition parties as more ideologically similar than other party pairs and more than is implied by their policy statements (see also Fortunato and Adams 2015; Adams, Ezrow and Wlezien 2016). Thus, a disconnect appears to exist between coalition parties' efforts to communicate their policy distinctiveness to the public, on the one hand, and voters' responsiveness to such party messages, on the other hand.

This article adds to the debate of how voters update their perceptions of coalition parties' issue positions by examining the role of partisan motivated reasoning and attention to politics. I argue that in the early stages of the government's tenure, voters perceive the coalition parties as holding more similar issue positions than before cabinet formation. The reason is that voters rely on the heuristic belief that coalition participation is a commitment by the governing parties to wide-ranging policy compromise and to working towards common policy goals (Fortunato and Stevenson 2013). As time elapses, however, coalition parties gradually succeed in communicating their policy differences to their supporters. Supporters of a coalition party engage in partisan motivated reasoning whereby they perceive policy differences between the coalition parties as greater the stronger their partisan identification and the more attention they pay to politics. Those who identify most strongly with a coalition party become less reliant on the coalition heuristic and instead give greater weight to the governing parties' countervailing messages, which are aimed at differentiating the parties' issue positions. Supporters of a coalition party will therefore perceive the policy distance between the coalition parties as greater, but only if they pay attention to politics and are receptive to their parties' communication strategies.

I test these arguments by examining how the coalition between the British Conservative Party and the Liberal Democrats between 2010 and 2015 influenced voters' perceptions on three policy issues: redistribution, crime and European integration. Because the coalition was a surprising exception to a long tradition of single-party governments, the United Kingdom is a good case for testing my arguments in that policy compromise was not already factored into voters' perceptions of the coalition parties. In other words, voters in the

United Kingdom were not pre-treated, as a result of which the effect of coalition participation on voter perceptions can be more easily identified.

A second reason for why the United Kingdom serves as a good case for testing my arguments is that it presents a most likely case for observing strong effects of the coalition heuristic and weak responsiveness to countervailing messages by coalition parties. In support, Fortunato and Adams (2015; Fortunato and Stevenson 2013) argue that voters rely on the coalition heuristic to a greater extent when the parties have no history of co-governance. Similarly, Stevenson and Vonnahme (2010) find that in systems where coalitions are the norm voters are more familiar with parties' issue positions, which in turn limits voters' reliance on the coalition heuristic (see also Drummond 2010; Fortunato and Stevenson 2013). Given that the 2010 coalition is an exception to a long legacy of single-party governments in the United Kingdom, voters' evaluations of coalition parties should be guided primarily by the coalition heuristic rather than by party messages.

Contrary to previous work, the empirical results show that voters are responsive to coalition parties' communicative attempts to differentiate themselves from other coalition partners. The findings emphasise the limits of the coalition heuristic for understanding how voters update their perceptions of coalition parties' issue positions in later stages of the government's tenure. Instead, the findings point to the important influence of partisan motivated reasoning and political attention. Changes in the perceived issue positions of coalition parties are explained by projection effects that are consistent with previous research on partisan motivated reasoning (Merrill, Grofman and Adams 2001; Drummond 2010; Fernandez-Vazquez and Dinas 2012; Grand and Tiemann 2013). Namely, supporters of a coalition party perceive the coalition parties as

more ideologically disparate because they primarily lengthen the distance to the other coalition party (contrast bias).

This article has important implications for the study of coalition governance, political communication, and partisan attachments. First, I show that coalition parties can be effective at differentiating themselves in the eye of the public and thereby present voters with clear policy alternatives. While coalition governance may require wide-ranging policy compromise, it importantly does not preclude coalition parties from conveying their policy differences to the public. Second, the article suggests that the importance of the coalition heuristic has been overstated, and instead it emphasises the combined influence of partisan motivated reasoning and political attention for understanding how voters track the policy positions of coalition parties. Third, the findings challenge the dominant view that junior coalition parties invariably get punished at the polls as a result of being perceived as ‘selling out’ their core policy positions. Rather, the cost of co-governing depends on whether a party either draws on a strong partisan base or relies predominantly on swing voters for electoral support. The implication is that parties face strong disincentives to join a coalition if their supporters are primarily swing voters instead of loyal partisans.

3.2 Voters’ Reliance on the Coalition Heuristic in the Short-Term

Existing research that seeks to understand how voters track the ideological movement of coalition parties focuses predominantly on the influence of institutional heuristics. A key conclusion of this research is that if voters care about but are unsure of parties’ policy positions, governing coalition arrangements will provide voters with an effective shortcut by conveying ideological informa-

tion about the coalition parties. For example, Fortunato and Stevenson (2013) argue that coalition participation serves as an easily observable and informative action that voters use as a heuristic device to update their perceptions of coalition parties. By joining a coalition the governing parties signal a commitment to wide-ranging policy compromise and to working towards common policy goals, and voters use this information to update their perceptions of the coalition parties' issue positions accordingly.

Fortunato and Stevenson (2013) present evidence that voters perceive coalition parties as more ideologically similar than other parties and more than is implied by the left-right tone of their election manifestos. Similarly, Fortunato and Adams (2015; Adams, Ezrow and Wlezien 2016) find that voters map the ideological position of the prime minister's party onto the junior coalition parties because of the heuristic beliefs that junior coalition parties wield less influence in the government and have to compromise the most. This article builds on previous research and evaluates how different types of voters update their perceptions of the policy distance between coalition parties during different stages of the government term (and on multiple issue dimensions).

When parties join a coalition government, they signal to the public their intention to agree to wide-ranging policy compromises and to work in unison towards common policy goals. For example, parties often commit to policy compromise by publishing coalition agreements with the aim to prevent future policy actions that deviate from the coalition bargain (Schermann and Ennsner-Jedenastik 2013; Moury 2011). Many parliamentary systems also practice the norm of collective cabinet responsibility that explicitly prohibits cabinet partners from openly criticising policy decisions made in cabinet (Laver and Shepsle 1994). An important aspect of this norm is that coalition partners must publicly

support a unified position and vote with the government, even if they privately disagree with the policy decision. Voters are therefore likely to perceive the coalition parties as holding more similar issue positions subsequent to cabinet formation. The reason is that during the early stages of the government's tenure the coalition compromise is a salient factor that shapes voters' perceptions of the policy similarities between the coalition parties (Fortunato and Stevenson 2013; Fortunato and Adams 2015).

H1: During the early stages of the government's tenure, voters perceive coalition parties as holding more similar issue positions than before cabinet formation.

3.3 Partisan Motivated Reasoning and the Long-Term Effects of Coalition Participation

Existing research has not yet examined how voters update their perceptions of the coalition parties during later stages of the government term. Fortunato and Adams (2015) acknowledge this striking omission and encourage future research to investigate the possibility that as time elapses coalition parties gradually succeed in differentiating their policy profiles. The authors posit that coalition parties, particularly junior partners, have strategic incentives to highlight their policy differences before elections so as not to alienate their core supporters (see also Adams, Dow and Merrill 2006; Ezrow 2010). Nevertheless, Fortunato and Stevenson (2013) imply that such strategies would be ineffective and argue that voters primarily form perceptions about coalition parties based on observable actions (i.e. coalition participation) rather than promises. The remainder of this article examines whether voters update their perceptions of the coalition

parties during later stages of the government's tenure. It moves beyond previous research, which emphasises the coalition heuristic, by focusing on the role of partisan motivated reasoning and attention to politics.

Partisan motivated reasoning provides a useful point of departure for understanding how individuals form political opinions, attitudes and beliefs. Partisan motivated reasoning refers to the tendency of individuals to interpret information through the lens of their partisan identification, seek out information that reinforces prior beliefs about their party (i.e. confirmation bias), or reject information that challenges such beliefs (i.e. disconfirmation bias) (Campbell et al. 1960; Taber and Lodge 2006; Bolsen, Druckman and Cook 2014; Leeper and Slothuus 2014). Many studies show that partisan motivated reasoning influences voters' perceptions of economic conditions (Bartels 2002; Evans and Andersen 2006), political controversies (Wagner, Tarlov and Vivyan 2014; Solaz, de Vries and de Geus 2018), government performance and responsibility (Tilley and Hobolt 2011; Thomson 2011), and key political events such as wars (Gaines et al. 2007). Partisan motivated reasoning can thus exert a powerful influence by raising 'a perceptual screen through which the individual see what is favorable to his partisan orientation' (Campbell et al. 1960, p. 133). Although the effects of partisan motivated reasoning are widely acknowledged, existing research has not fully examined its influence on voter perceptions of coalition parties.¹

My main argument is that voters will perceive the coalition parties as holding more different issue positions during later stages of the government's tenure, but only if they identify with a coalition party. As already discussed,

¹A notable exception is a study by Meyer and Strobl (2016), which examines the effect of partisan beliefs on voters' perceptions of hypothetical coalition governments.

governing in a coalition requires broad-ranging policy compromise, which voters may see as diluting the coalition parties' integrity, principles, and identity (White and Ypi 2016). Yet coalition parties try to maintain and increase their electoral base by communicating to target audiences – particularly during later stages of the parliamentary term – that they have stayed true to their principles and have successfully defended the interests of their supporters (Martin and Vanberg 2008). For example, coalition parties increasingly focus their communication strategies on differentiation from the other cabinet partners before elections in an effort to strengthen their policy profiles (Sagarzazu and Klüver 2017). Fortunato (2018) also finds that coalition parties amend one another's legislative proposals more vigorously in an effort to distinguish themselves in the eyes of the electorate.

Partisan motivated reasoning makes voters more likely to seek out (or weigh more strongly) information that reinforces their pre-existing partisan loyalties, and therefore supporters of a coalition party will be more receptive to their party's messages. Voters who identify with a coalition party are motivated to distinguish their party from other governing parties because of a desire to protect and advance their party's status and electoral dominance (Huddy 2001; Huddy and Bankert 2017). In support, research from social psychology explains that party identification creates a motivational need for positive distinctiveness (Tajfel 1974; Greene 1999). But the motivation to distinguish one's party from its coalition partners is most likely to arise in response to electoral threats or uncertainty (Huddy and Bankert 2017; Huddy 2013; Mackie, Devos and Smith 2000). Coalition parties are therefore able to influence their supporters' perceptions by strategically highlighting their distinct policy profiles before elections. As a result, supporters of a coalition party will perceive policy differences be-

tween the coalition parties as greater during later stages of the government's tenure.

Voters who do not identify with a coalition party have no motivational need for positive distinctiveness between the coalition parties (Kelly 1988; Greene 1999). These voters are less likely to internalise messages that work against the simple coalition heuristic, which leads voters to perceive the cabinet partners as holding more similar issue positions. When updating their perceptions about the coalition parties, these voters will continue to give greater weight to easily observable actions (i.e. coalition participation, coalition agreement), and they will attach less importance to countervailing messages from the coalition parties. This leads to the following expectation:

H2a: In later stages of the government's tenure, voters perceive coalition parties as holding more different issue positions, but only if they identify with a coalition party.

Previous research posits that partisan motivated reasoning is positively related to the strength of party identification (Leeper and Slothuus 2014), generating the expectation that those who identify most strongly with a coalition party express the greatest motivational need for positive distinctiveness. Strong partisans will therefore be most receptive to messages from their party about policy differences to other coalition partners, and they will attach greater weight to such messages when updating their perceptions of the coalition parties. Consequently, the degree to which voters are motivated to exaggerate policy differences between the coalition parties should increase with the strength of voters' party identification. Voters who identify more strongly with a coalition party

are therefore expected to perceive the coalition parties as holding more different issue positions compared to weak partisans.

H2b: Stronger identification with a coalition party is associated with a greater increase in the perceived policy distance between the coalition parties (in later stages of the government's tenure).

3.4 The Moderating Role of Attention to Politics

Attention to politics is another important factor that conditions the degree to which voters update their perceptions of the coalition parties' issue positions. The key point is that not all voters are equally likely to receive messages by the coalition parties about their policy differences. Political communication (e.g. public speeches, parliamentary debates, press releases) about the legislative activities of the coalition parties is more likely to reach voters who are more attentive to politics, and this should affect how voters update their perceptions of coalition parties' policy positions. In support, Fortunato and Stevenson (2013) find that politically attentive voters rely less strongly on the simple coalition heuristic to track parties' ideological movements. The more politically attentive voters are the greater they will perceive the policy differences between the coalition parties. This expectation relates to the later stages of the electoral cycle during which the coalition parties will increasingly highlight their distinct policy profiles. In contrast, voters who pay little attention to politics will not receive messages by the coalition parties that work against the simple coalition heuristic and will therefore not update their perceptions of the coalition parties.

Although paying more attention to politics increases voters' exposure to political messages by the coalition parties, not all voters will give equal weight to

such messages when updating their perceptions. Specifically, politically attentive voters will give more weight to messages of coalition parties if they identify with a coalition party. This is because partisan supporters are motivated to seek out and attribute greater credibility to information that reinforces their positive beliefs about their party (Zaller 1992). Indeed, research shows that politically attentive voters tend to engage more strongly in partisan motivated reasoning because they have invested more resources in forming their political opinions and will assess new information in relation to their partisan attachments (Zaller 1992; Taber and Lodge 2006; Wagner, Tarlov and Vivyan 2014). As a result, partisan motivated reasoning is expected to magnify the effect of political attention on the perceived policy distance between the coalition parties.

H3: Political attention is positively related to increases in the perceived policy distance between the coalition parties, and the effect is stronger for partisans of a coalition party.

3.5 Policy Differentiation by the British Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats

The coalition between the British Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats provides a good illustration of how coalition parties strategically communicate their policy similarities and differences. Upon signing a coalition agreement in May 2010, the two parties signalled to the public their determination to work towards common policy goals while in government. On the question of Europe, for example, the coalition agreement aimed to reconcile the pro-EU position of the Liberal Democrats with Conservative Euroscepticism by declaring to have struck ‘the right balance between constructive engagement with

the EU to deal with the issues that affect us all and protecting our national sovereignty' (HM Government, 2010: 19). The agreement emphasised common ground on EU reform between both parties that concerned issues such as global competitiveness, completion of the single market and budget reform (Lynch 2015). On the question of redistribution, the coalition agreement also found common ground between the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats by re-asserting both parties' commitment to accelerated deficit reduction by means of reduced spending rather than increased taxes (HM Government, 2010: 15). The coalition agreement ensured that both parties maintained good working relationships and functioned as a united government during the initial phase, which Bennister and Heffernan (2015) describe as a 'civilised partnership'.

By 2012, however, fears of being overshadowed by a Conservative-led coalition prompted the Liberal Democrats to pursue a marked differentiation strategy. Both cabinet parties increasingly dropped their pro-coalition stance and thereby entered the second phase of the coalition, dubbed 'uneasy cohabitation' by Bennister and Heffernan (2015). The coalition partners regularly engaged in public disputes, illustrating the electoral need to be seen to disagree with each other by their partisan supporters (Beech 2015). Such disputes led Prime Minister David Cameron to organise exclusive cabinet meetings with Conservative ministers, who would meet before the full cabinet (Bennister and Heffernan 2015). Increasing tensions within the coalition also resulted in the Liberal Democrats publicly distancing themselves from their coalition partners' austerity measures by publishing an alternative Liberal Democrat 'Yellow budget' (Cutts and Russell 2015).

By 2013 the coalition partners had abandoned any pretence of working towards common policy goals, as ministers were increasingly encouraged to

argue for their party's positions and to criticise their cabinet partner. Bennis-ter and Heffernan (2015) describe this third phase of the coalition as 'living together in disharmony'. Cameron, for example, continued to decouple Conservative and Liberal Democrats positions on Europe by announcing in his famous 'Bloomberg speech' that the Conservatives would negotiate a new settlement in the EU and hold an in-out referendum on whether the UK should remain in the EU. Following the announcement, Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg heavily criticised Cameron for succumbing to Eurosceptic pressure (Lynch 2015). Clegg also made repeated claims that the Liberal Democrats had been decisive in blocking Conservative policies from inheritance tax cuts for millionaires to scrapping housing benefits for young people (Cutts and Russell 2015).

During the later stages of the government's tenure, cabinet ministers increasingly used media interviews and speeches outside of parliament in an effort to publicly differentiate the parties' policy profiles (Goes 2014). Not only did such public disputes between the coalition partners become more frequent and ill-tempered, they also covered salient policy issues, such as the economy, Europe, or immigration (Beech 2015). My narrative account of the behaviour of the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats during their time in government is consistent with previous empirical research, which finds that as elections approach coalition parties increasingly emphasise their policy differences to signal to their supporters that they have not compromised on key policy commitments (Martin and Vanberg 2008; Fortunato 2018; Sagarzazu and Klüver 2017). In what follows, I examine to what degree voters respond to coalition parties' communication strategies at different stages of the parliamentary term.

3.6 Data

To examine how voters update their perceptions of the policy distance between parties that enter into a coalition government I use cross-sectional and panel data from the 2005, 2010 and 2014 British Election Study (BES) surveys. All surveys asked each respondent the same questions about their party identification, previous vote choice, political attention, sociodemographic background, perceptions of party's positions on redistribution, and respondents' own positions on redistribution. Only the 2005 and 2014 surveys, however, asked respondents also about their position and their perceptions of parties' positions on European integration, and the 2010 pre- and post-election surveys asked respondents about their positions and perceptions of parties' positions on crime policy. The BES survey data enables me to examine how individuals track the positions of coalition parties on multiple issue dimensions, which is a strength over previous research that has only focused on the left-right ideological dimension.

Another benefit of using BES data is that the surveys include a sufficiently large number of respondents to explore how different voter groups (e.g. partisans of a coalition party) change perceptions over time. The 2005 BES survey includes 2,971 and 2,641 respondents who rated the coalition parties' positions on redistribution and European integration respectively. The 2010 rolling campaign BES survey includes 13,646 respondents who rated the coalition parties' positions on redistribution. The 2010 BES pre- and post-election survey includes 3,983 and 3,504 respondents who rated the coalition parties' positions on redistribution and crime policy respectively. The 2014 BES survey includes 21,489 and 11,898 respondents who rated the coalition parties' posi-

tions on redistribution and European integration respectively. The datasets are stacked to examine how voters update their perceptions of the policy distance between parties after coalition formation.

The 2010 pre- and post-election survey panel was fielded before and after the Liberal Democrats and the Conservative Party went into a coalition government in May 2010. The 2005 election survey and the 2010 rolling campaign survey took place before coalition formation, and the 2014 survey was fielded towards the final year of the coalition government but before the beginning of the election campaign. The Liberal Democrats effectively began their election campaign in September of 2014 with the publication of a pre-manifesto, after which the Liberal Democrats set out several ‘red lines’ for coalition negotiations with Labour and the Conservatives. In the run-up to the election, the Conservative Party also announced their commitment to avoid going into a coalition and making further policy compromises with the Liberal Democrats. Voters are likely to have responded to the parties’ campaign promises by updating their perceptions of the coalition parties. This article is, however, less concerned with the question of how voters update their perceptions of parties that leave a coalition. Rather, this article seeks to understand how governing in a coalition affects voters’ short-term and long-term perceptions of the coalition parties. I therefore compare pre-coalition BES surveys with the post-election component of the 2010 BES survey and the pre-campaign 2014 BES survey.

3.7 Operationalisation

The main dependent variables in this study are the absolute perceived policy distance on redistribution, crime policy and European integration between the Conservative Party and the Liberal Democrats. In all BES surveys, respondents

rate their own position and each party's position for the different policy issues on a scale from zero to ten. On redistribution, higher values denote lower support for redistribution and taxation. On crime policy, lower values denote stronger support for reducing crime relative to protecting individual rights. On European integration, higher values denote stronger support for the UK to unite fully with the European Union. The absolute distance on redistribution, crime policy and European integration between the coalition parties ranges from zero to ten, with higher values indicating a greater distance.

Party attachments are measured by stated party identification. Respondents are asked whether they think of themselves as Labour, Conservatives, Liberal Democrats or one of the other parties. I distinguish between respondents who report that they identify with one of the coalition parties and those who do not. As a robustness check, I also use vote choice in 2005 as an alternative measure for party attachments. The variable distinguishes between respondents who voted for a coalition party in 2005 and those who did not. Comparing changes in perceptions among groups of respondents who voted for a coalition party in 2005 (before coalition formation) helps to mitigate the bias that may stem from an endogenous measure of party attachments. Besides party attachments, the empirical analysis also examines the effects of political attention. Attention to politics is measured on a scale from zero to ten, with higher values denoting greater attention to politics. All BES surveys used in the analysis ask the same question about political attention and offer the same response categories, which enables me to draw direct comparisons.

In addition to the theoretically-motivated variables, I account for several control variables. Recent research highlights the importance of controlling for respondents' ideological extremity, as ideologically extreme voters tend to per-

ceive most parties as different from themselves and therefore may overstate the policy distance between the coalition parties (Fortunato and Stevenson 2013; Fortunato and Adams 2015). The ideological extremism variable measures how far respondents place themselves away from the centre of the redistribution or European integration policy scales. The variable ranges from zero to five, with higher values denoting a more extreme policy preference. Moreover, Fortunato and Stevenson (2013; Fortunato and Adams 2015) show that when respondents place themselves between the coalition parties, the respondents are more likely to place the parties farther apart than they would if they placed themselves either to the left or the right of the coalition parties. I therefore include a dummy variable that takes the value zero for respondents who place themselves to either side of both coalition parties, and a value of one otherwise.

Other measured characteristics of respondents I control for in the empirical analysis are gender and age, as both variables have been associated with differences in the accuracy of parties' perceived policy positions (Spoon and Klüver 2017). But because this article focuses on the perceived policy distance between coalition parties and not on the accuracy of perceptions, I have no clear theoretical intuition about the effect of age and gender. Similarly, Fortunato and Stevenson (2013; Fortunato and Adams 2015) report that sociodemographic controls have no significant bearing on voters' perceptions of the policy distance between parties. The authors investigate, but ultimately rule out, the possibility that individual-level characteristics may increase the likelihood that respondents place parties at the centre of the policy scale. Consistent with their findings, I also find that only a small proportion of respondents (approximately six per cent) places both coalition parties at the centre of the policy scale, and the findings are robust to the exclusion of these respondents.

3.8 Analysis

Using pre- and post-election panel data, I first estimate a fixed-effects model to examine whether voters update their perceptions of policy differences between the coalition parties on redistribution and crime policy immediately after coalition formation. I then evaluate whether different types of voters update their perceptions of the coalition parties during later stages of the government term. To do so I compare how different voter groups adjust the perceived policy distance between the coalition parties, first, on European integration between 2005 (pre-coalition) and 2014 (later stage of coalition), and second, on redistribution between 2010 (pre-coalition) and 2014 (later stage of coalition). The perceived policy distance between the coalition parties is regressed on an interaction between a dummy denoting coalition participation and a dummy denoting whether or not a respondent identifies with one of the coalition parties.

The reason for using cross-sectional data for the second part of the analysis is that respondents were not tracked over several years following the 2010 election in the panel. One concern with this lack of panel data is that the empirical findings will be biased if respondents' party identification is endogenous to the perceived policy distance between the coalition parties. For example, one expectation is that voters might become more likely to identify with a coalition party if they support the coalition agreement and perceive the governing parties as ideologically unified and effective. If this were to be the case the findings would be conservative estimates because they would be biased against my hypotheses. An alternative expectation is that voters may abandon their attachment to a coalition party because they perceive the party to have compromised their policy positions. In this case the findings would overestimate

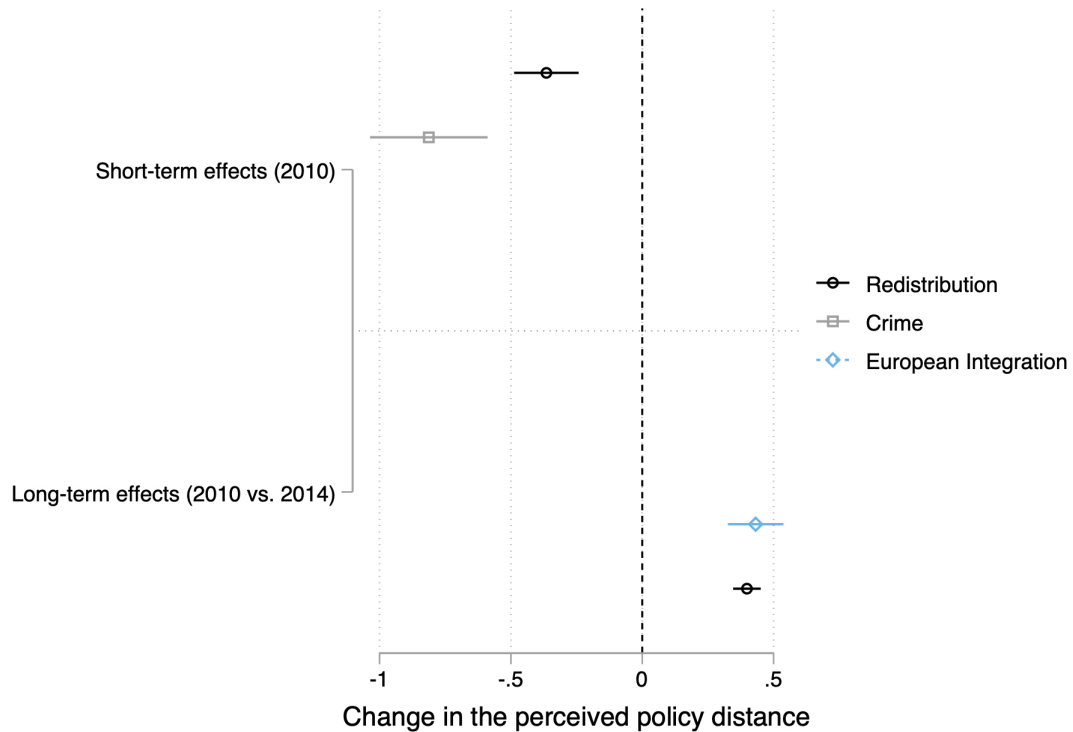
the degree to which partisan motivated reasoning influences voters' perceptions of coalition parties. As a robustness check, I present evidence in the appendix that the findings are similar if voters are grouped together according to their current party identification or their vote choice prior to coalition formation.

3.9 Results

The first part of the analysis examines whether voters perceive the coalition parties as holding more similar issue positions during the early and later stages of the government's tenure compared to before cabinet formation. The results, which are illustrated in figure 3.1, provide strong support for hypothesis 1. Voters perceived the coalition parties as holding more similar positions on redistribution and crime policy after the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats agreed to enter into a coalition government. The perceived policy distance decreased on average by 0.365 on redistribution and by 0.8125 on crime policy. These short-term effects of coalition participation are statistically significant and substantial in light of the fact that more than half of all respondents initially perceived the policy distance between the coalition parties as no larger than one on redistribution and two on crime policy. Consistent with Fortunato and Stevenson (2013), the findings indicate that voters rely on coalition participation as a heuristic that leads them to perceive the coalition parties as holding more similar issue positions in the early stages of the government term.

Nevertheless the findings also highlight that voters' reliance on the coalition heuristic is short-lived and that it does not extend to later stages of the government term. In fact, the opposite appears to be the case insofar as respondents perceive the ideological distance between the coalition parties as greater in 2014 than they did before the formation of the coalition in 2010. Respondents

Figure 3.1: The short- and long-term effects of coalition participation



Note: The graph compares how respondents updated their perceptions of the policy distance between the coalition parties on redistribution and crime policy before the election and immediately after coalition formation. It also illustrates the change in the public's perceived policy distance between the coalition parties before coalition formation and before the upcoming election campaign in 2014.

perceive the coalition parties as diverging by 0.40 points on redistribution and by 0.43 points on European integration. The findings are in contrast to Fortunato and Stevenson (2013; Fortunato and Adams 2015; Adams, Ezrow and Wlezien 2016), who posit that coalition participation prompts voters to perceive the coalition parties as more ideologically similar and that voters' perceptions of the coalition parties are not meaningfully influenced by party communication. Instead, the results presented in figure 3.1 suggest that as time elapses coalition parties can succeed at differentiating themselves in the eye of the public and

escaping the policy shadow of their coalition partners (Fortunato and Adams 2015).

The second part of the analysis explores the heterogeneity in voters' long-term responses to the coalition government with a focus on party identification and attention to politics. My main theoretical argument is that coalition participation is a highly salient event that shapes voters' short-term perceptions of the coalition parties in a uniform manner, but that over time voters will differ in how they update their perceptions of the coalition parties based on their party identification and their level of political attentiveness. The results that are presented in table 3.1 relate to hypothesis 2a. Four multivariate regression models are specified. The first two models relate to voters' perceptions on redistribution, while the third and fourth models relate to voters' perceptions on European integration. In addition, models two and four control for age, gender, and political attention.

The results provide support for hypothesis 2a. Voters who identify with a coalition party perceive the coalition parties as holding more different issue positions in later stages of the government term and more than voters who do not identify with a coalition party. The coefficient for the interaction between the coalition participation and the coalition partisan dummy variables is statistically significant across both policy issues and in all regression models. Given that the median perceived distance between the coalition parties is one for redistribution and two for European integration, the size of the coefficients for the interaction terms (0.711 for redistribution and 0.980 for European integration) is substantial. Note that voters who do not identify with a coalition party perceived the coalition parties as holding slightly more different positions on redistribution, but they did not update their perceptions of the coalition parties'

Table 3.1: Partisan motivated reasoning and long-term perceptions of coalition policy

	DV: Perceived policy distance on			
	Redistribution (1)	Redistribution (2)	European integration (3)	European integration (4)
Extremism	0.378*** (0.008)	0.351*** (0.009)	0.347*** (0.011)	0.311*** (0.013)
Placed between parties	2.897*** (0.032)	2.766*** (0.035)	3.099*** (0.053)	2.896*** (0.062)
Coalition participation	0.317*** (0.030)	0.157*** (0.034)	0.554*** (0.060)	0.097 (0.066)
Age	—	-0.003*** (0.001)	—	-0.000 (0.001)
Gender	—	-0.199*** (0.025)	—	-0.331*** (0.047)
Political attention	—	0.179*** (0.006)	—	0.247*** (0.011)
Coalition partisan	-0.077** (0.032)	-0.139*** (0.032)	0.082 (0.085)	-0.019 (0.084)
Coalition participation x Coalition partisan	0.662*** (0.047)	0.711*** (0.051)	0.875*** (0.098)	0.980*** (0.101)
Intercept	1.090*** (0.022)	0.464*** (0.071)	0.891*** (0.058)	0.126 (0.129)
R-squared	0.23	0.27	0.20	0.26
Respondents	34,251	27,347	13,578	9,775

Note: Robust standard errors are in parentheses. Reference category for coalition partisan: voters who do not identify with one of the coalition parties. Models 1 and 2 are based on the 2010 and 2014 BES surveys, while models 3 and 4 are based on the 2005 and 2014 BES surveys.

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

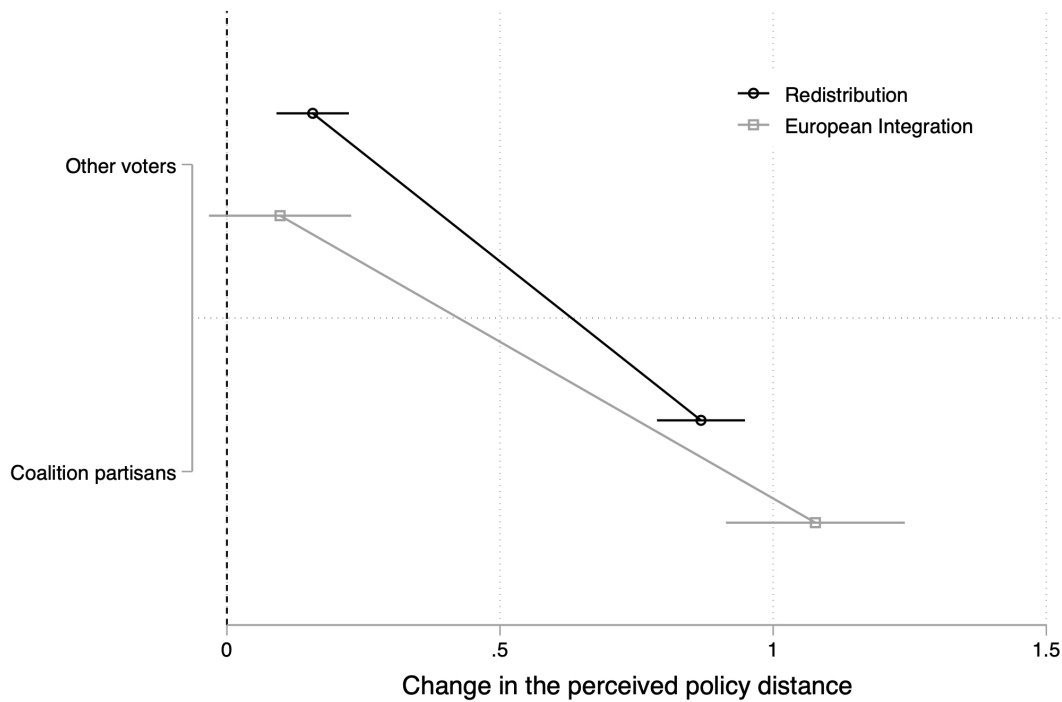
positions on European integration.

Figure 3.2 illustrates the moderating effect of partisan motivated reasoning on the perceived policy distance between the coalition parties. Voters who identify with a coalition party perceive the distance between the coalition parties as substantially larger after coalition formation, whereas other voters update their perceptions only minimally. The results are similar if party attachments are measured based on party identification and previous vote choice. Similarly, the results are robust to using the 2005 BES survey as a reference category instead of the 2010 BES survey (see table B.1 in the appendix). Overall, the findings provide evidence for the influence of partisan motivated reasoning, as voters who identify with a coalition party perceive a greater increase in the policy distance between the coalition parties than other voters.

The effect of coalition participation and partisan motivated reasoning on the perceived policy distance between the coalition parties remains substantial after adding controls for age, gender, and political attention. Greater attention to politics is associated with a greater perceived policy distance, while women perceive the policy distance as smaller. Age has a statistically significant negative effect on the perceived policy differences, but the coefficient is small compared to any of the other variables included in the models. Finally, respondents who hold more extreme policy preferences or place themselves between the coalition parties perceive the distance between the coalition parties as greater. The coefficients for both variables are similar in magnitude compared to the ones estimated by Fortunato and Stevenson (2013).

The results presented in table 3.2 relate to hypothesis 2b, which states that stronger partisan attachments are associated with greater positive changes in the perceived policy distance between the coalition parties. To evaluate

Figure 3.2: Partisan motivated reasoning and the effect of coalition participation



Note: The graph compare changes in voters' perceptions of the policy distance between the coalition parties between 2010 and 2014 among coalition partisans and other voters.

hypothesis 2b, two models are specified for each policy issue, one with and another without sociodemographic control variables. As I am interested in the effect of stronger partisan attachments, the models only include respondents who identify with a coalition party. The results provide support for hypothesis 2b because the interaction term between coalition participation and partisan strength is positive and statistically significant in all models. The magnitude of the moderating effect of partisan strength is illustrated in figure 3.3. During later stages of the government's tenure, weak partisan supporters perceive the policy distance between the coalition parties as approximately 0.5 points greater on redistribution and 0.7 points greater on European integration. In contrast,

moderate partisans perceive the distance as 0.8 points greater on redistribution and 1.1 points greater on European integration. Strong partisans update their perceptions of the ideological distance between the coalition parties the most and perceive the ideological distance 1.1 points greater on redistribution and 1.5 points greater on European integration.

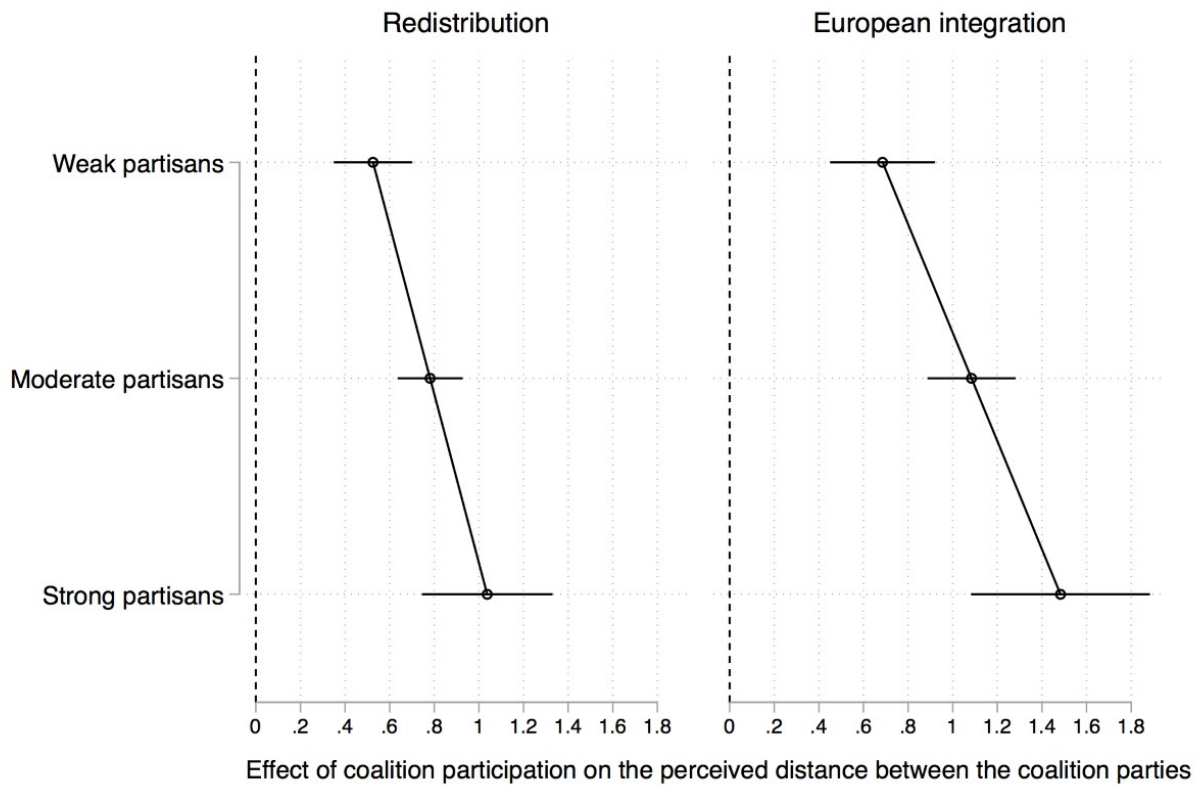
Table 3.2: Partisan strength and the effect of coalition participation on the perceived policy distance between the coalition parties

DV: Perceived policy distance on				
	Redistribution	Redistribution	European integration	European integration
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Extremism	0.501*** (0.013)	0.465*** (0.014)	0.478*** (0.019)	0.457*** (0.022)
Placed between parties	2.573*** (0.046)	2.457*** (0.050)	2.30*** (0.088)	2.296*** (0.102)
Coalition participation	0.293*** (0.101)	0.242** (0.112)	0.567** (0.225)	0.287 (0.234)
Age	—	-0.004*** (0.001)	—	0.006** (0.002)
Gender	—	-0.155** (0.040)	—	-0.323*** (0.076)
Political attention	—	0.144*** (0.010)	—	0.218*** (0.021)
Partisan strength	0.203*** (0.038)	0.059 (0.038)	0.328*** (0.120)	0.120 (0.116)
Coalition participation x Partisan strength	0.303*** (0.055)	0.298*** (0.060)	0.386*** (0.132)	0.399*** (0.134)
Intercept	0.494*** (0.070)	0.271** (0.126)	0.901*** (0.227)	-0.566** (0.269)
R-squared	0.30	0.32	0.22	0.26
Respondents	12,827	10,458	5,056	3,691

Note: Robust standard errors are in parentheses. The analysis includes only partisans of a coalition party. Models 1 and 2 are based on the 2010 and 2014 BES surveys, while models 3 and 4 are based on the 2005 and 2014 BES surveys.

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

Figure 3.3: The moderating effect of partisan strength on long-term perceptions



Note: The graphs compare how weak, moderate and strong partisans of one of the coalition parties updated their perception of the policy distance between the coalition parties in 2014. Respondents who do not identify with a coalition party are excluded from the analysis.

Models two and four demonstrate that partisan strength is only associated with a greater perceived policy distance between the coalition parties after coalition participation. The findings are evidence that stronger partisans update their perceptions of the coalition parties to a greater extent. This suggests that stronger partisans are more receptive to political messages by the coalition parties that work against the simple coalition heuristic, which leads other voters to perceive the coalition parties as more ideologically similar. The coefficients of the control variables are similar to the ones estimated in the models presented

in table 3.1. Most notable is the strong and positive relationship between attention to politics and the perceived ideological distance between the coalition parties across both policy issues. I next evaluate whether attention to politics moderates the way in which voters update their perceptions of the coalition parties.

Hypothesis 3 states that attention to politics is positively related to changes in the perceived policy distance between the coalition parties, and that the effect is stronger for partisans of a coalition party. Voters who pay little attention to politics are not expected to update their perceptions of the coalition parties, irrespective of whether or not they identify with a coalition party. In contrast, politically attentive coalition partisans are expected to update their perceptions more strongly than politically attentive voters who do not identify with a coalition party. To evaluate this expectation, I test whether the interaction effect between coalition participation and political attention is larger for coalition partisans than for other voters. Because three-way interactions are difficult to interpret, I first estimate separate models for coalition partisans and other voters with two-way interactions between political attention and coalition participation in table 3.3. The appendix includes results from regressions with three-way interactions in table B.2, and the corresponding marginal effects are presented in figure 3.4.

Results from table 3.3 show that respondents who pay no attention to politics do not update their perceptions of the coalition parties after coalition formation, as the coefficient for coalition participation is not statistically significant in any model. As attention to politics increases, however, coalition participation exerts a stronger positive influence on respondents' perceived ideological distance between the coalition parties. The coefficient for the interaction term

Table 3.3: Political attention and the effect of coalition participation

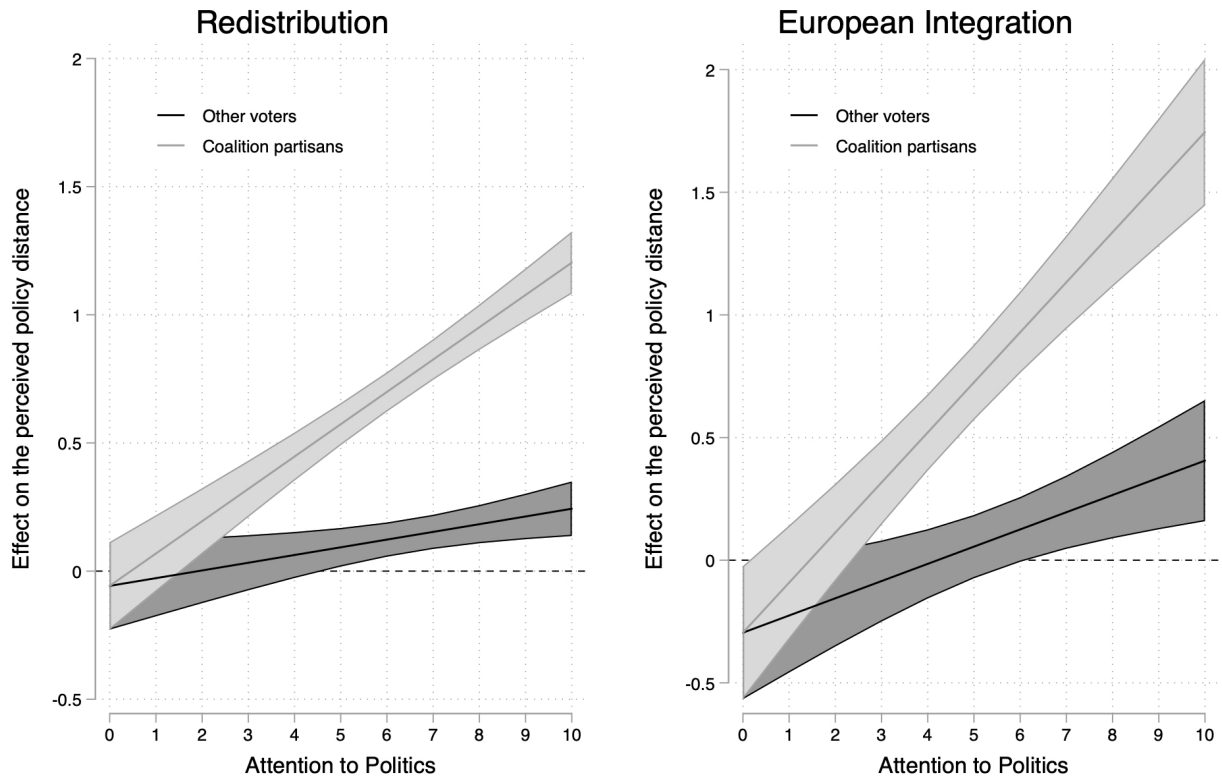
DV: Perceived policy distance on	Redistribution		European integration	
	Coalition	Other	Coalition	Other
	partisans	voters	partisans	voters
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Extremism	0.482*** (0.014)	0.279*** (0.011)	0.467*** (0.022)	0.219*** (0.016)
Placed between parties	2.424*** (0.050)	3.049*** (0.047)	2.332*** (0.100)	3.171*** (0.074)
Coalition participation	-0.107 (0.159)	-0.039 (0.103)	-0.330 (0.257)	-0.282* (0.160)
Age	-0.003** (0.001)	-0.003*** (0.001)	0.007*** (0.002)	-0.004** (0.002)
Gender	-0.161*** (0.040)	-0.209*** (0.032)	-0.334*** (0.075)	-0.369*** (0.057)
Political attention	0.115*** (0.012)	0.171*** (0.009)	0.135*** (0.035)	0.192*** (0.021)
Coalition participation x Political attention	0.122*** (0.021)	0.038*** (0.014)	0.192*** (0.041)	0.068*** (0.026)
Intercept	0.528*** (0.122)	0.598*** (0.094)	0.040 (0.267)	0.907*** (0.169)
R-squared	0.32	0.25	0.26	0.27
Respondents	10,332	17,015	3,814	6,176

Note: Robust standard errors are in parentheses. Models 1 and 2 are based on the 2010 and 2014 BES surveys, while models 3 and 4 are based on the 2005 and 2014 BES surveys.

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

is positive and statistically significant in all models. Consistent with my expectation, the interaction term is substantially larger for coalition partisans. For example, a one-unit increase in attention to politics increases the effect of coalition participation on the perceived ideological distance on redistribution by 0.122 points for coalition partisans but only by 0.038 points for other voters. Similarly, an increase in political attention increases the effect of coalition participation on the perceived ideological distance on European integration by 0.192 for coalition partisans and only 0.068 for other voters.

Figure 3.4: The moderating effect of political attention on long-term perceptions



While the results from table 3.3 suggest that attention to politics magnifies the effect of coalition participation more for coalition partisans, figure 3.4 demonstrates that the differences between coalition partisans and other voters are statistically significant and substantial. On both policy issues, respondents who do not pay attention to politics do not update their perceptions of the perceived policy distance after coalition formation. Respondents who do not identify with a coalition only update their perceptions of the coalition parties minimally if they pay a great deal of attention to politics. In contrast, coalition partisans update their perceptions of the coalition parties more strongly the more attention they pay to politics. For example, the most politically interested

coalition partisans perceive the policy distance on redistribution as 1.01 points greater after coalition formation, whereas other voters with similarly high levels of political interest only perceive the ideological distance as 0.24 points greater. On European integration, the most politically interested coalition partisans perceive the ideological distance as 1.75 points greater after coalition formation, whereas other voters perceived the distance as 0.41 points greater.

The effects are similar if party attachments are measured either by stated party identification or by previous vote choice and if the 2005 BES survey is used as a reference category instead of the 2010 BES survey (see table B.2 in the appendix). Overall, the findings provide strong evidence that attention to politics leads to greater changes in the perceived policy distance between coalition parties, and that this effect is stronger for voters' who identify with a coalition party.

3.10 Partisan Motivated Reasoning and Contrast Bias

The next step is to examine how respondents update their perceptions of each of the coalition parties' policy positions relative to their own policy preferences. A basic premise of partisan motivated reasoning is that voters process information and update their perceptions in a way that conforms to prior attitudes, behaviours and beliefs (Campbell et al. 1960; Conover 1981). Previous research shows, for example, that partisan motivated reasoning leads voters to place their preferred party closer to their own preferences (assimilation bias) and parties they do not support further away (contrast bias) (e.g. Granberg and Jenks 1977; Judd, Kenny and Krosnick 1983; Merrill, Grofman and Adams 2001; Drummond 2010; Fernandez-Vazquez and Dinas 2012). It follows then

that if coalition parties publicly emphasise their policy differences, voters who identify with a coalition party should also distance themselves from the coalition party they do not support. Finding that supporters of a coalition party push the other coalition party further away from their own policy preferences would thus provide additional evidence that voters engage in partisan motivated reasoning when updating their perceptions of coalition parties' policy positions.

Because not all voters engage equally strongly in partisan motivated reasoning, the effects of coalition participation on assimilation and contrast bias are also likely to be heterogeneous. Specifically, the expectation that supporters of a coalition party will distance themselves ideologically from the rival coalition party during later stages of the government's tenure applies predominantly to strong partisan identifiers, who engage most strongly in partisan motivated reasoning (see table 3.2 and figure 3.3). Table 3.4 compares the share of weak, moderate and strong partisan identifiers for each party to guide our expectations about how the effects of coalition participation should differ for Conservative and Liberal Democrats partisans.

Table 3.4 demonstrates that the electoral base of the Liberal Democrats has the highest proportion of weak partisan identifiers (49 percent in 2014 and 50 percent in 2000) and the lowest proportion of strong partisan identifiers (9 percent in 2014 and 2010) compared to all other parties' electoral base. In contrast, the electoral base of the Conservatives consists of only 29 and 30 percent of weak partisans in 2014 and 2010 respectively, while strong partisans made up 16 percent and 19 percent of the Conservative's electoral base in 2014 and 2010 respectively. These differences in the composition of the coalition parties' electoral base is striking, and they suggest that Conservative partisans will update their perceptions of the policy distance to the Liberal Democrats

the most, whereas supporters of the Liberal Democrats should update their perceptions of the policy distance to the Conservatives much less.

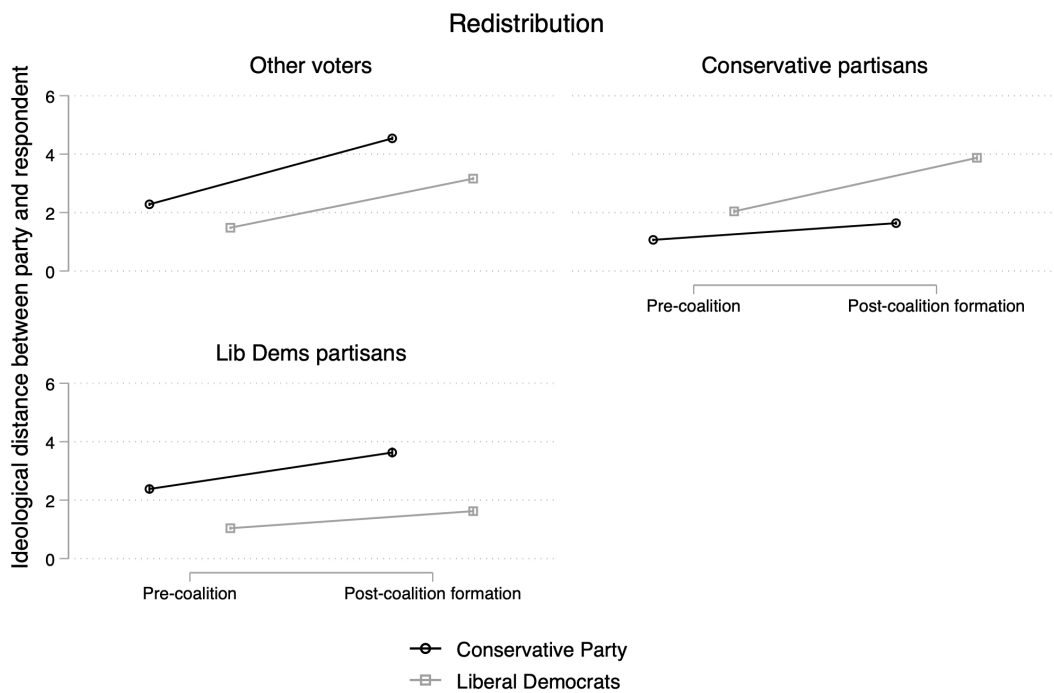
Table 3.4: Composition of parties' electoral base

Party ID:	Strength of party ID 2014				Strength of party ID 2010			
	N	Weak	Moderate	Strong	N	Weak	Moderate	Strong
Labour	8,518	26%	52%	22%	4,840	32%	48%	20%
Conservative	7,495	29%	55%	16%	4,528	30%	52%	19%
Lib Dems	1,761	49%	42%	9%	1,944	50%	42%	9%
SNP	1,555	11%	46%	43%	345	18%	51%	31%
Greens	1,033	28%	55%	17%	296	41%	47%	13%
UKIP	2,385	14%	49%	36%	610	30%	50%	20%
Plaid Cymru	275	20%	53%	28%	78	36%	47%	17%
Total	23,022	26%	52%	22%	12,641	34%	49%	18%

In what follows, I examine changes in the ideological distance between respondents and each of the coalition parties after coalition formation. Results from the regressions, which can be found in tables B.4 and B.5 in the appendix, are presented in figure 3.5. Figure 3.5 illustrates how the ideological distance between respondents and the coalition parties changed on redistribution. On redistribution, supporters of the Conservative Party pushed the Liberal Democrats further away from their own preferred policy position after coalition formation (contrast bias), while the ideological distance between the Conservative party and their supporters remained stable. Supporters of the Liberal Democrats predominantly pushed the Conservative Party away from their own position while maintaining close ideological proximity to their own party. As expected, contrast bias towards the rival coalition party is considerably stronger for partisans of the Conservatives than for partisans of the Liberal Democrats. Other voters who do not identify with a coalition party became more distant to both the Liberal Democrats and the Conservative Party. The findings pro-

vide additional evidence on the effects of partisan motivated reasoning and the way in which voters track the policy positions of parties that join a coalition government.

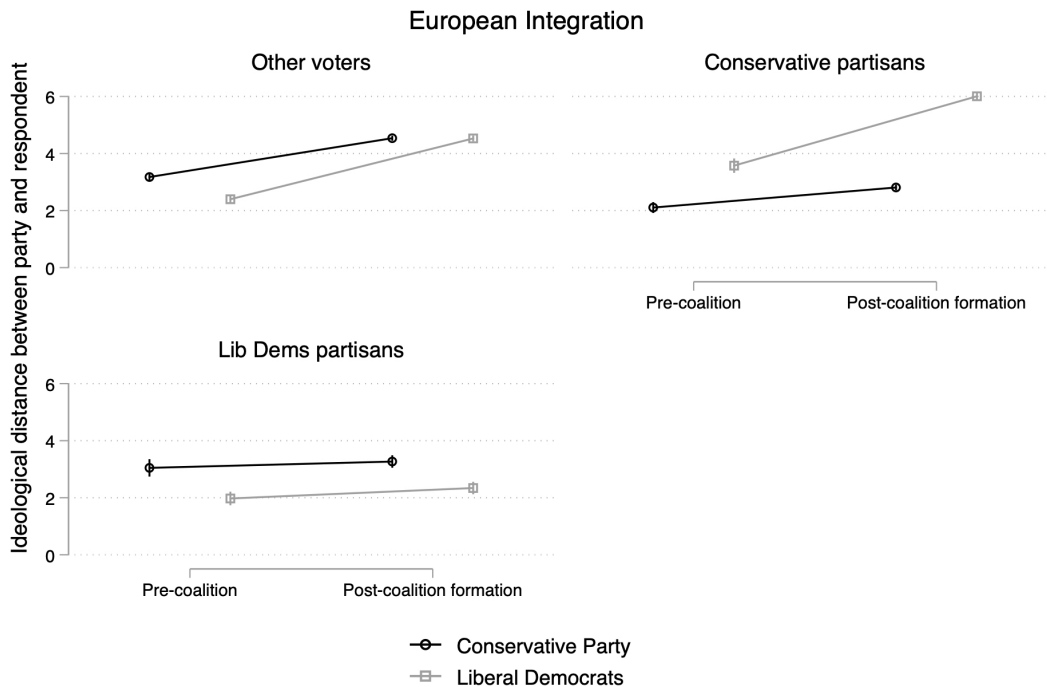
Figure 3.5: The ideological distance between voters and the coalition parties on redistribution



Coalition participation led to similar changes in the perceived ideological distance between voters and the coalition parties on the European integration policy dimension. Voters who do not identify with a coalition party pushed both the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives further away from their own position. Partisans of the Conservative Party largely maintained close ideological proximity to their party, while they distanced themselves significantly from the Liberal Democrats. Partisans of the Liberal Democrats also maintained the ideological proximity to their party, but they engaged less strongly in partisan

motivated reasoning and therefore did not significantly increase the ideological distance to the Conservative Party after coalition formation. Overall, the results provide strong evidence that partisans of a coalition party perceive the coalition parties as diverging because they engage in partisan motivated reasoning and distance themselves from the coalition party they do not support.

Figure 3.6: The ideological distance between voters and the coalition parties on European integration



3.11 Discussion and Conclusion

This article has investigated how voters update their perceptions of parties' policy positions when they enter into a coalition argument. In contrast to existing work, I have argued that voters will rely less on the coalition heuristic to update

their perceptions the longer the coalition parties have been in government together. Coalition parties strategically emphasise their policy differences in later stages of the parliamentary term, and I have argued that some voters will be more receptive to this type of party communication than others. Specifically, the degree to which voters respond to the coalition parties' 'differentiation' messages depends, first, on whether they identify with a coalition party, and second, how attentive to politics they are. Supporters of a coalition party engage in partisan motivated reasoning such that they differentiate their preferred party from its coalition partner during later stages of the government term. Partisans of a coalition party do this not only because they attach more weight to their party's messages, but also to preserve their distinctive partisan identity.

I have tested these theoretical arguments by examining the short- and long-term consequences of the unique and surprising coalition between the British Conservative Party and the Liberal Democrats. The findings present strong evidence that voters rely on the coalition heuristic to update their short-term perceptions of the coalition parties, but that over time the coalition parties succeed at differentiating their policy positions in the eyes of their supporters and politically attentive voters. Partisan motivated reasoning is a key reason for why supporters of a coalition party perceive the coalition parties as diverging ideologically from one another. Namely, supporters of a coalition party perceive the coalition parties as diverging more from one another the stronger their partisan attachments are to one of the parties. And second, they perceive the coalition parties as diverging from one another by lengthening the ideological distance between their own position and the position of the coalition party they do not support.

This article makes several important contributions to the study of coalition governance, political communication and partisan attachments. While previous research posits that voters form and update their perceptions of parties' ideological positions on the basis of governing coalition agreements (Fortunato and Stevenson 2013; Fortunato and Adams 2015; Adams, Ezrow and Wlezien 2016), this article demonstrates that voters predominantly rely on the coalition heuristic in the short-term, when coalition participation is a salient political event. As time elapses, however, coalition parties can succeed at differentiating themselves in the eye of the public, thereby presenting voters with clear policy alternatives. The implication is that coalition participation need not lead to perceived policy convergence by the coalition parties and a perceived restriction of the set of alternative policy choices. Rather, governing in a coalition can present the cabinet parties with opportunities to distinguish their policy profiles to their partisan supporters and attentive voters.

The findings also challenge the dominant view that junior coalition parties invariably get punished at the polls as a result of being perceived as 'selling out' their core policy positions. In this regard, Adams and Fortunato (2015) present evidence that voters update their perceptions of junior coalition parties' left-right positions to reflect the positions of the prime minister's party. Their argument is that voters map the policy position of the prime minister's party onto the junior coalition parties because they see them as less influential in government and as having to compromise the most. In contrast, I find that supporters of the junior coalition party do not perceive their party as shifting towards the prime minister's party in the later stages of the government term. This suggests that parties are only more likely to get punished at the polls for joining a coalition if they rely to a large degree on swing voters and do not

have a strong partisan base. Swing voters are more likely to perceive the junior coalition parties as adopting the positions of the prime minister's party and punish the junior coalition parties accordingly for 'selling out'. Consequently, a party only faces clear disincentives to enter into a coalition if its supporters are primarily swing voters instead of loyal partisans.

Although the surprising coalition between the British Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats provided an excellent case for studying the effects of partisan motivated reasoning on voters' perceptions of the coalition parties, future research should examine to what extent the findings apply to countries where coalitions are the norm. Nevertheless, this article presents an important step forward in our understanding of coalition politics, party communication and partisan motivated reasoning.

4 | Does Voter Polarisation Induce Party Extremism? The Moderating Role of Abstention

Abstract

This article contributes to the literature on representation by examining how the ideological polarisation of the electorate affects parties' programmatic positions in multiparty systems. The main argument is that parties face incentives to adopt more extreme positions when the electorate becomes more ideologically polarised and the share of non-moderate voters is higher. The reason is that by adopting moderate positions parties will prompt their non-moderate core constituents to sit out the election. This risk is conditioned by voters' propensity to abstain. A higher (lower) propensity to abstain means that parties alienate a larger (smaller) share of their core constituents when adopting a moderate position. Parties therefore respond to greater voter polarisation by adopting more extreme positions, but the effect declines as voters' propensity to abstain decreases. An empirical analysis of parties' programmatic positions in

eleven Western European countries between 1977 and 2016 strongly supports this expectation.

4.1 Introduction

What is the influence of voters' ideological polarisation on parties' programmatic positions in multiparty democracies? Recent theoretical and empirical work suggests that parties adopt more extreme positions when voters are more ideologically polarised (Cox 1990; Merrill and Adams 2002; Ezrow 2007). The findings are given a positive interpretation insofar as a central function of parliaments is to represent the diversity of public opinion (Pitkin 1967). While scholars of representation often emphasise the primacy of the median voter, Cox (1997) argues instead that the representative process should be judged by the degree to which voters can find representatives who advocate similar preferences. If parties predominantly adopt centrist positions that appeal only to the median voter, voters with non-centrist ideological preferences are not adequately represented. From a normative perspective, the menu of ideological alternatives in a given country should thus increase with the ideological polarisation of the electorate (Andrews and Money 2009).

Despite increased scholarly interest in the causes of party system dispersion (see Ezrow 2008; Dalton 2008; Andrews and Money 2009; Dow 2011; Curini and Hino 2012; Matakos, Troumpounis and Xefteris 2016; Fenzl 2018), evidence that parties' programmatic positions respond to the ideological polarisation of the electorate is limited. The few empirical studies that investigate the relationship between party positioning and voter polarisation present contrasting results. Ezrow (2007) shows that changes in party system dispersion on a dominant left-right dimension correlate with corresponding changes in the ideological polarisation of the electorate (see also Adams, de Vries and Leiter 2012). In contrast, Dalton (2008) finds no evidence that party system disper-

sion is affected by voters' ideological polarisation (see also Adams, Green and Milazzo 2012).

This article contributes to the debate by arguing that the effect of voter polarisation on parties' policy positions is conditioned by voters' propensity to abstain. I argue that when the electorate becomes more ideologically polarised, parties increasingly face the risk that moderate policy positioning will alienate their non-moderate core constituents. The reason is that higher voter polarisation increases the share of core constituents with non-moderate ideological preferences. Vote losses from alienated core constituents might be offset by vote gains from moderate swing voters, but this depends on voters' propensity to abstain. A high propensity to abstain means that parties are unable to retain the support of their core constituents when adopting a moderate policy position, whereas a low propensity to abstain reduces the risk of alienating core constituents. Consequently, parties are expected to adopt more extreme policy positions when the electorate becomes more ideologically polarised, but the effect declines as voters' propensity to abstain decreases.

I test my arguments empirically by analysing parties' left-right positions in eleven Western European countries between 1977 and 2016. In accordance with previous research, I rely on Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP) data (Volkens et al. 2017) for party positions and Eurobarometer surveys to measure the ideological polarisation of the electorate. Turnout is used as a proxy for voters' propensity to abstain, and party extremism is measured as the distance between a party's position and the weighted mean of all parties' positions in a given country for each election. The empirical findings provide strong evidence that parties adopt more extreme positions in response to higher voter polarisation and that the size of the effect declines as turnout increases. The effect of

voter polarisation on party extremism disappears when turnout is at least 75 per cent.

The findings are robust to the inclusion of various control variables, different model specifications and alternative measures of my dependent variable. For example, I find similar effects when the dependent variable is the commonly used measure of weighted party system dispersion (see Ezrow 2007; Curini and Hino 2012; Matakos, Troumpounis and Xefteris 2016; Kosmidis et al. 2018). I also address concerns over potential endogeneity bias, as the direction of causality between turnout and party extremism might run in both directions. While this may be the case for individual-level turnout, however, I find no evidence that party positioning affects aggregate-level turnout. Overall, the robustness checks increase my confidence in the validity of the findings.

This study contributes to the literature on representation by showing that the effect of voter polarisation on party extremism is conditional on voters' propensity to abstain. Parties adopt more extreme positions in response to greater voter polarisation, but only when voters have a high propensity to abstain. The findings build on previous theoretical and empirical studies that either find a positive relationship between voter polarisation and party extremism (Cox 1990, Merrill and Adams 2003; Ezrow 2007) or that argue that no such relationship exists (Dalton 2008). Moreover, my empirical analysis covers an extensive number of elections and ranges from 1977 to 2016, whereas previous studies have relied on much shorter periods of 22 years (Ezrow 2007), fourteen years (Adams, Green and Milazzo 2012), or two consecutive elections (Dalton 2008). Finally, this study offers a positive outlook for representative democracy. Much of previous scholarship focuses on how abstention fosters unequal representation (Schlozman, Verba and Brady 2012; Peters and Ensink

2015; Fenzl 2018), while my findings suggest that the threat of abstention can motivate parties to represent a wider range of ideological preferences.

4.2 Background and Hypothesis

My hypothesis about the conditional effect of voter polarisation builds on previous theoretical and empirical work that argues that parties adopt more extreme positions as the electorate becomes more ideologically polarised. The argument was originally formulated by Downs (1957), who suggested that in multiparty democracies the dispersion of a party system along an ideological left-right dimension would reflect the ideological polarisation of the electorate. Vote-seeking parties adopt more extreme positions when the electorate becomes more ideologically polarised, whereas they adopt more moderate positions if voters are compacted together.

Merrill and Adams (2002) later formalised this argument by challenging a standard assumption that voters strictly vote for the ideologically closest party. Instead, voters are assumed to have partisan attachments, which lead voters to bias voting decisions in favour of their ‘own’ party. For clarity, I refer to voters with such partisan attachments as core constituents and distinguish them from independent swing voters. Numerous empirical studies document the presence of partisan biases, whereby voters perceive their own party as ideologically closer (assimilation bias) and other parties as more ideologically distant (contrast bias) than they actually are (see Campbell et al. 1960; Merrill, Grofman and Adams 2001; Bartels 2002; Drummond 2011). Merrill and Adams (2002) then show that the presence of such partisan attachments in multiparty systems leads increased voter polarisation to shift each party’s vote-maximising position in the direction of its (non-moderate) core constituents.

The intuition behind such an argument is clear. A party's marginal probability of attracting its own core constituents via policy appeals is higher than the marginal probability of attracting swing voters, who have no attachment to that party. When the electorate becomes more ideologically polarised and voters have more extreme preferences, the share of non-moderate core constituents will also be higher. This in turn prompts vote-seeking parties to adopt more extreme policy positions. In contrast, a low degree of voter polarisation enables a party to target moderate swing voters without losing support of its core constituents. Building on these arguments, Ezrow (2007) finds that parties adopt more extreme policy positions when voters become more ideologically polarised. Dalton (2008), however, disagrees that voter polarisation should influence party positions on the grounds that parties shift their policy positions for a variety of factors that are unrelated to changes in voter's ideological preferences. This study contributes to the debate by arguing that the effect of voter polarisation on party extremism is moderated by voters' propensity to abstain due to alienation.

The propensity to abstain due to alienation refers to the smallest discrepancy between a voter's ideological position and the closest party's position at which that voter will choose to sit out the election (Hinich and Ordeshook 1969). When voters have a high propensity to abstain, they are motivated to vote in an election only if the ideological distance to the closest party is relatively small. In contrast, a low propensity to abstain means that voters are motivated to vote even if the ideological distance to the closest party is relatively large. Previous research reports ample evidence that parties mobilise voters via their policy positions. Lefkofridi, Giger and Gallego (2014), for example, show that voters with extreme ideological preferences become more likely to participate in

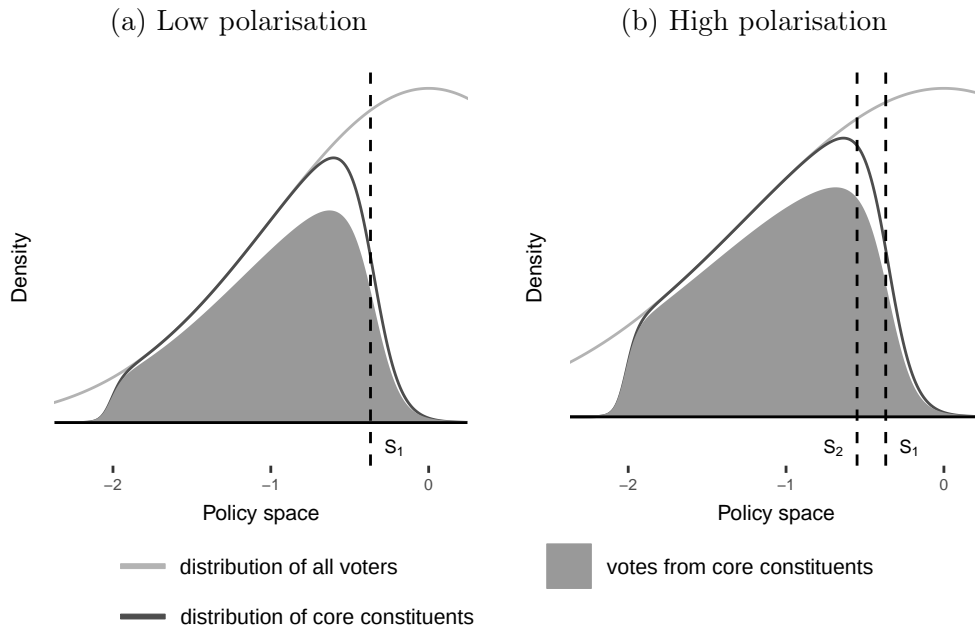
an election if a party exists that advocates similar positions. In related research, Brockington (2009) finds evidence of a positive correlation between the richness of a system’s ‘choice environment’ and individual-level turnout. Similarly, Wesels and Schmitt (2008) find that voters are more likely to turn out if their ideological preferences are represented (see also Adams, Dow and Merrill 2006). While empirical research shows that a wider ideological range of political offers increases individual-level turnout, there is limited evidence that it also affects aggregate-level turnout (Ezrow and Xezonakis 2016).

The evidence thus suggests that parties can be effective at mobilising alienated voters, but does abstention due to alienation also motivate parties to shift their policy positions? Merrill and Adams’s (2002) theoretical analysis ignores abstention, although the authors discuss its role elsewhere (see Adams and Merrill 2003; Adams, Merrill and Grofman 2005). This article addresses the question and posits that the threat of abstention due to alienation is important for understanding the relationship between voter polarisation and party extremism. To understand why this is the case, I simulate scenarios that demonstrate the effect of voter polarisation and abstention based on Merrill and Adams (2002). As the simulated results serve mainly to illustrate the mechanism, I provide a detailed description of the theoretical assumptions and the method of calculating parties’ vote-maximising positions in the appendix.

Figure 4.1 (a) zooms in on a hypothetical left-wing party l and its core constituents in a multiparty system.¹ The light grey line represents the distribution of voters along a left-right ideological dimension. Party l ’s vote-maximising positions S are represented by the vertical dashed line. The dark grey line represents the distribution of the party’s core constituents, and the grey area under

¹For clarity of presentation, the figure focuses on a party’s own core constituents, even though vote-maximising positions are based on the entire electorate.

Figure 4.1: Effect of heightened polarisation on the vote-maximising position



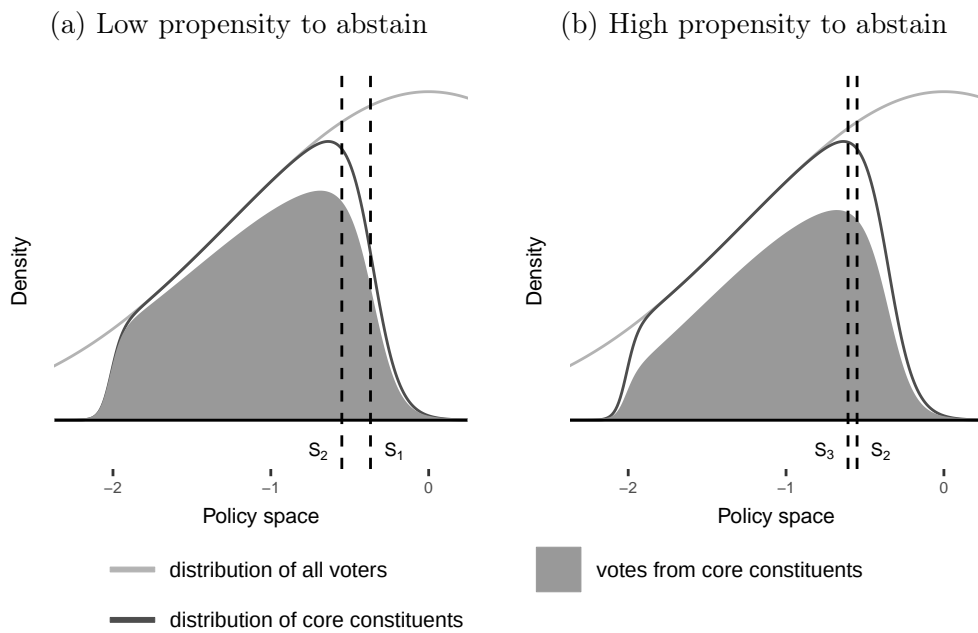
Note: Figure (a) shows party l 's position S_1 in the base scenario with low polarisation and low propensity to abstain. Figure (b) shows the party's shift from S_1 to the new position S_2 resulting from heightened polarisation. The distribution of voters is indicated by the gray line, the distribution of core constituents of party l by the black line, and the gray area shows the core constituents actually voting for party l out of all its core constituents. The median voter position is at zero.

the curve denotes core constituents who vote for their party. In the first scenario, voters have a low propensity to abstain and polarisation is low. Unsurprisingly, party l 's vote-maximising position at S is relatively moderate because core constituents have predominantly moderate preferences.

In the second scenario (figure 4.1 (b)) the propensity to abstain remains low, but the electorate is more ideologically polarised. Accordingly, core constituents have now spread toward the left extreme of the ideological dimension, causing party l 's vote-maximising position also to become more extreme and to shift from S_1 to S_2 . This result is explained by the fact that core constituents are biased toward their own party, which makes marginal policy shifts in the direction of core constituents more effective than marginal policy shifts in the

direction of other voters. Although an increase in voter polarisation has shifted party l 's vote-maximising position in the direction of its core constituents, S_2 is still more moderate than the median core constituent. The reason is that without the threat of abstention, party l faces a low risk of alienating non-moderate core constituents and is thus able to target moderate swing voters with position S_2 . Merrill and Adams (2002) get the same results to those presented in figure 4.1. The following scenarios, however, differ in that parties now face a potential threat of abstention. A party's vote-maximising policy position therefore depends not only on whether it maximises the number of voters that prefer that party, but also on whether those voters are willing to participate in the election.

Figure 4.2: Effect of heightened propensity to abstain on the vote-maximising position



Note: Figure (a) shows high polarisation but low propensity to abstain, with party l 's original position at S_1 and the party's position under heightened polarisation at S_2 . Figure (b) shows the party's shift from S_2 to the new position S_3 under high polarisation and heightened propensity to abstain. For an explanation of the colours see figure 4.2.

Figure 4.2 illustrates how party l 's vote-maximising position changes

when voters have a higher propensity to abstain and when the electorate is still ideologically polarised. In scenario (a) the propensity to abstain is low and party l 's vote-maximising position is still at S_2 . An increase in voters' propensity to abstain in (b) now shifts party l 's vote-maximising position to S_3 . Given voters' increased propensity to abstain, the position S_2 now alienates a large share of non-moderate core constituents and no longer maximises party l 's vote share. This is because positioning at S_2 does not yield sufficient votes from moderate swing voters to outweigh vote losses from alienated core constituents. The vote-maximising position therefore becomes more extreme and shifts from S_2 to S_3 . The threat of abstention among non-moderate core constituents makes moderate party positioning unattractive, and increasingly so as voters spread toward the extremes of the ideological dimension. This leads to the following hypothesis:

H1: Higher voter polarisation induces parties to adopt more extreme policy positions, and the effect increases as voters' propensity to abstain increases.

In contrast, lower voter polarisation will motivate parties to adopt more moderate positions, particularly when the threat of moderate voter abstention increases. The reason for this is that extreme party positioning will alienate a larger share of moderate voters if polarisation is low.

While the theoretical reasoning only considers the effect of abstention from alienation, it is important to spell out whether my theoretical predictions would change if abstention was also prompted by indifference. Abstention from indifference occurs if parties are too ideologically similar to justify the cost of voting (Adams, Haupt and Stoll 2009). For illustrative purposes I first consider the effects of a party adopting a more radical position. If a party shifts to a

radical position in an effort to mobilise its alienated core constituents, the party will simultaneously mobilise moderate indifferent citizens to vote for rival parties (Adams and Merrill 2003). However, by differentiating itself ideologically from other parties, the party will also mobilise its own moderate and indifferent core constituents. Abstention due to indifference should therefore motivate parties to establish a minimum degree of ideological differentiation, but it is not clear to which degree abstention from indifference counteracts the effects of abstention from alienation. The fact that my empirical analysis finds evidence that parties' positions are more radical at higher levels of abstention and polarisation suggests that abstention from indifference does not cancel out the effect of abstention from alienation.

Note also that the effect of voter polarisation depends on the strength of party attachments. Stronger attachments weaken the effect of polarisation because parties have a greater ability to retain the support of their non-moderate core constituents when adopting moderate positions. In support, Ezrow, Tavits and Homola (2014) show that extremist parties benefit less from voter polarisation if party attachments for moderate parties are strong. This means that the risk of moderate parties losing support of their non-moderate core constituents to extremist parties depends on the strength of party attachments. Moreover, the threat of extremist parties should be higher in systems that feature a larger number of parties and where party competition is greater. The empirical analysis controls for the effective number of parties in a system, which should incentivise parties to become more extreme (Andrews and Money 2009; Curini and Hino 2012; Matakos, Troumpounis and Xefferis 2016). I also follow previous empirical research of party representation by assuming that parties compete for votes by formulating manifestos in which they make public their

policy commitments. While policy positions comprise several issue dimensions, for simplicity, I only consider a dominant left-right dimension (see Adams and Somer-Topcu 2009; Adams, Haupt and Stoll 2009; Adams and Ezrow 2009; Ezrow et al., 2011; Schumacher, de Vries and Vis 2013).

Because developing party manifestos is time-consuming, parties' policy appeals are retrospective, i.e. they respond to the previous election. Party manifestos usually evolve over several years before an election, during which time party elites, activists, and parties' policy committees have to negotiate and agree on the policies that will be adopted in the party programme (Klüver and Spoon 2016; Adams and Somer-Topcu 2009). Policy appeals are retrospective in the sense that parties rely on the previous election to form their expectations about voters' behaviour in the current election. For example, high abstention in the previous election serves as a proxy for voters' propensity to abstain in the following election. Similarly, voter polarisation in the previous election serves as a guide for polarisation in the current election. The focus on these lagged measures is also justified because alternative predictions of abstention and polarisation are less informative. Surveys and polls tend to overestimate turnout because non-voters are under-sampled and respondents often misreport voting intentions (Mellon and Prosser 2017). Moreover, voter turnout from regional elections cannot accurately predict abstention at national elections because they tend to be less salient.

4.3 Empirical Operationalisation

My hypothesis posits that parties adopt more extreme positions in response to higher voter polarisation in the previous election, and that the effect is conditional on voters' propensity to abstain. Accordingly, parties are expected to

respond more strongly to voter polarisation as voters' propensity to abstain in the previous election increases. To test the conditional effect of polarisation on party positioning, I require longitudinal and cross-national measures of party extremism, voter polarisation and voters' propensity to abstain.

I rely on Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP) (Volkens et al. 2017) data to measure party extremism on a dominant left-right policy dimension. The CMP has coded party programs of most significant parties since 1945 in over 50 countries and therefore provides a useful longitudinal and cross-sectional measure of parties' policy positions that is widely used in research on party representation (see Adams et al. 2004; Ezrow 2007; Jansen, Evans and de Graaf 2013; Adams, Ezrow and Somer-Topcu 2014; Adams, Ezrow and Wlezien 2016). Using parties' election manifestos, the CMP identifies what proportion of quasi-sentences can be allocated to each of the 54 policy areas that are identified. Left-right scores are then measured as the difference in percentages of right statements from the percentages of left statements, divided by the total number of statements. The definition of left and right statements was developed by Laver and Budge (1992) who use within-country factor analysis of a range of coding categories that load consistently at the opposite ends of the underlying dimension.

The CMP left-right measure has been found to be consistent with those utilised by other party positioning studies, such as expert placements, voters' perceptions of party positions or parliamentary voting of party members, which strengthens my confidence in the reliability of the CMP measure (Hearl 2001; Laver, Benoit and Garry 2003; McDonald and Mendes 2001). Party positions range from -100 to +100, whereby higher values denote more right-wing positions. I have rescaled party positions from the -100 to +100 scale used by

the CMP to fit the 1-10 scale that is used by Eurobarometer surveys. By using the same scale for party positions and voters' ideological preferences, I am able to draw meaningful comparisons between the degree of party extremism and voters' ideological dispersion. My measure for party extremism is based on the distance between a party and the weighted mean of all parties' left-right positions in a given country for each election year. The more distant a party is from the weighted mean of all parties' left-right positions, the more extreme that party is thought to be (see Alvarez and Nagler 2004; Ezrow 2007; Dalton 2008; Curini and Hino 2012). My measure of party extremism is defined as:

$$Party\ Extremism = \sqrt{(P_{jk} - \bar{P}_k)^2} \quad (4.1)$$

where P_{jk} denotes the left-right position of party j in country k and \bar{P}_k is the weighted mean left-right position of all parties in country k for a given election year. Party extremism ranges from 0 to 9, whereby higher values denote a greater distance between a party's left-right position and the mean left-right position of all parties. The unit of analysis in this study is hence the political party. While my measure of party extremism focuses on the positioning of individual parties, recent studies that seek to explain party positioning have predominantly employed a measure of party system dispersion that is weighted by party size (Ezrow 2007; Dalton 2008; Curini and Hino 2012; Matakos, Troumpounis and Xefteris 2016; Kosmidis et al. 2018). I therefore test whether my findings are robust to using a weighted measure of party system dispersion, which is defined as:

$$Weighted\ Party\ System\ Dispersion = \sqrt{\sum_{j=1} VS_j (P_{jk} - \bar{P}_k)^2} \quad (4.2)$$

where VS represents a party's vote share. This specification of party system dispersion helps to eliminate bias resulting from positions taken by smaller parties.

Data on voters' ideological preferences is based on Eurobarometer surveys. Eurobarometer surveys ask approximately 1,000 respondents from each country each year on where they would place themselves on a left-right ideological scale from 1 to 10, where higher values indicate more right-wing preferences. The first year in my dataset is 1976, which is when the Eurobarometer surveys began to ask voters to place themselves on a left-right ideological scale on a yearly basis. The dataset covers the following eleven Western European democracies: Denmark, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, and Spain. Belgium is not included in the dataset because it features a compulsory voting system with high turnout levels that exhibit little variation over time. My measure of voters' ideological polarisation is based on the standard deviation of respondents' ideological preferences in the Eurobarometer surveys (see Alvarez and Nagler 2004; Ezrow 2007; Dalton 2008; Adams, Green and Milazzo 2012; Ezrow, Tavits and Homola 2014). A greater standard deviation means that the share of voters who have more extreme ideological preferences is higher. Data on voter turnout comes from the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (2017). As discussed in the theoretical analysis, given polarisation, turnout from the previous election is used as a proxy for voters' propensity to abstain in the current election.

Previous studies of representation suggest that policy positions of parties depend on the incentives created by electoral laws. Matakos, Troumpounis and Xefferis (2016), for example, argue that party extremism decreases with

electoral disproportionality and increases with the effective number of parties (see also Cox 1997; Andrews and Money 2009; Dow 2011; Curini and Hino 2012). In contrast, Ezrow (2008) finds no evidence that more proportional systems or a higher number of effective parties promote extreme party positioning. I control for potential effects of electoral laws by including variables for electoral disproportionality and the effective number of parties. Electoral system disproportionality scores are based on Gallagher (1991) and the effective number of parties on the votes level is based on the measure developed by Laakso and Taagepera (1979). I rely on the Comparative Political Data Set for data on both variables (Armingeon et al. 2017). In related research, Ezrow (2007) argues that parties are more responsive to changes in the polarisation of voters' ideological preferences in less proportional voting systems, which motivate parties to emphasise vote-seeking objectives. In the appendix, I therefore test whether parties respond more strongly to voter polarisation and turnout in less proportional systems. Consistent with Ezrow (2007), I find some evidence that electoral disproportionality magnifies the conditional effect of voters' ideological polarisation on party extremism.

Finally, the empirical analysis controls for whether a party held the prime minister position at the time of the election. My expectation is that the prime minister's party tends to follow a broader representation strategy and therefore adopts more centrist policy positions than other parties. Data on the prime ministerial status of a party is taken from the ParlGov database (Döring and Manow 2016). The ParlGov database also provides information on vote shares, which is used for my measure of weighted party system dispersion.

4.4 Model Specification and Findings

To test my hypothesis, I estimate two types of statistical models. The first type is a time-series cross-sectional model with country or party fixed effects. It is specified as follows:

$$E_{it} = \alpha + \beta_1 W_{it-1} + \gamma X_{it-1} + \eta_i + \omega_t + \epsilon_{it} \quad (4.3)$$

where E_{it} is a party's degree of left-right policy extremism in country i at election year t ; α is a constant; W is a vector of the independent variables and an interaction between turnout and voter polarisation; X is a vector of control variables, which include electoral disproportionality, the effective number of parties, and prime minister party status; η are country or party fixed effects; ω are decade fixed effects; β and γ are the parameters to be estimated; ϵ is the error term. This type of model controls for unobserved and time-invariant party- or country-specific fixed effects as well as decade fixed effects.

The second type is a pooled time-series cross-sectional model without fixed effects but with a lagged dependent variable, and it is specified as:

$$E_{it} = \alpha + \rho E_{it-1} + \beta_1 W_{it-1} + \gamma X_{it-1} + \epsilon_{it} \quad (4.4)$$

The key assumption of the second type of model is that the most important omitted variables that explain party extremism are not time-invariant, but that party extremism in the current election is predicted by party extremism in the previous election. Including a lagged dependent variable in the model deals with the issue of autocorrelation but prevents us from also including fixed effects, as estimates would be biased and inconsistent (Nickell 1981). Angrist and

Pischke's (2009) advice is therefore to compare estimates from the fixed effects model and the model with a lagged dependent variable because the true causal effect is likely to be bracketed by both types of models. The empirical analysis reveals that estimates from both types of models are similar, which suggests that my findings are robust to different identifying assumptions. Moreover, I follow the suggestion of Plümper, Troeger and Manow (2005) to use a Prais-Winsten transformation rather than a lagged dependent variable to eliminate serial correlation of the error term. The authors suggest that the inclusion of a lagged dependent variable can be problematic in panel data analyses because it absorbs much of the theoretically interesting time-series variance. Results from the models using a Prais-Winsten transformation are reported in the appendix and they are consistent with estimates from the fixed effects models and models that include a lagged dependent variable.

The empirical analysis evaluates the effect of lower levels of abstention and polarisation in the previous election on the diversity of party positions in the current election. Although modelling changes in the independent variables would be an interesting alternative, such an approach presents at least two difficulties. First, a simple model based on changes does not account for cumulative effects. However, it is likely that parties adjust their positions only once turnout has decreased to a sufficiently low level. Indeed, a simple translation of my specified model to consider changes in the key variables does not produce a statistically significant effect of a change in turnout and polarisation (see table C.7 in the appendix). Second, modelling changes in the independent variables would ignore that the interaction effect between turnout and polarisation depends on countries' average levels of turnout and polarisation. I find evidence that the same change in turnout will have a smaller effect in a country with

higher turnout (see table C.6 in the appendix). Similarly, I expect that parties will respond more strongly to an increase in polarisation in countries with lower average polarisation. It is therefore more appropriate to evaluate my hypothesis by modelling the effect of polarisation and turnout on party positions.

Five different models are estimated. The first model includes the main independent variables and the interaction as well as country- and decade-specific fixed effects. The second model includes a lagged dependent variable instead of fixed effects. I add control variables to all remaining models and observe how estimates change when party-specific fixed effects are included instead of country-specific fixed effects, or when a lagged dependent variable is included instead of fixed effects. All models that include a lagged dependent variable are estimated with panel-corrected standard errors to deal with panel heteroscedasticity (Beck and Katz 1995). Because the dataset is unbalanced, the interpanel covariance matrix of the disturbances is estimated using pairwise selection.

The fixed effects models are based on 695 observations of 154 parties from eleven Western European countries between 1977 and 2016. Because parties respond to voter polarisation and turnout in the previous election in my model, one observation is sacrificed for each party that contested an election in the first year covered in my dataset. The models that include a lagged dependent variable are based on 600 observations from 119 parties, as one observation is sacrificed for each party that appears in only one election year (35 parties) or that came into existence after the first election year covered in the dataset for a given country (60 parties).

Results from the five regression models are presented in table 4.1. In all models the interaction between voter polarisation and turnout is negative and statistically significant, indicating that the effect of voter polarisation on party

Table 4.1: Party extremism in eleven Western European countries

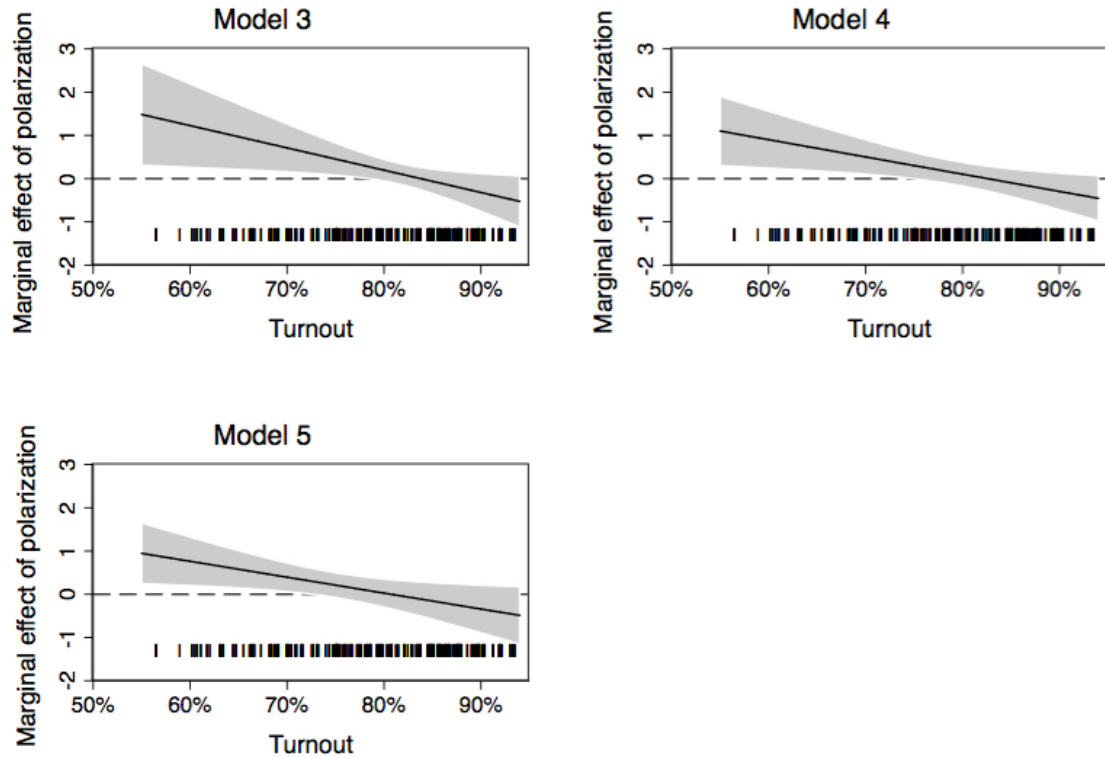
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Party extremism _{t-1}		0.494*** (0.074)			0.457*** (0.074)
Turnout _{t-1}	0.103** (0.043)	0.084** (0.034)	0.094* (0.043)	0.070** (0.032)	0.081** (0.032)
Polarisation _{t-1}	4.775** (1.958)	3.130** (1.252)	4.317** (1.809)	3.295*** (1.258)	2.969** (1.227)
Disproportionality _{t-1}			0.004 (0.016)	-0.002 (0.010)	0.007 (0.006)
PM party _{t-1}			-0.225*** (0.055)	-0.072 (0.061)	-0.124*** (0.044)
Effective number of parties _{t-1}			0.032 (0.019)	0.023 (0.029)	0.052** (0.021)
Polarisation _{t-1} × Turnout _{t-1}	-0.057** (0.023)	-0.039** (0.017)	-0.052** (0.022)	-0.040** (0.016)	-0.037** (0.016)
Constant	-7.698** (3.620)	-6.414** (2.509)	-7.112* (3.539)	-4.838* (2.527)	-6.379*** (2.456)
Lagged dependent variable		✓			✓
Country fixed effects	✓		✓		
Party fixed effects				✓	
Decade fixed effects	✓		✓	✓	
R-squared: within	0.036		0.064	0.060	
R-squared: between	0.000		0.082	0.010	
R-squared: overall	0.004	0.289	0.051	0.036	0.312
Observations	695	600	695	695	600

Note: p* < 0.10, p** < 0.05, p*** < 0.01, two-tailed tests. Robust standard errors in parentheses. Panel-corrected standard errors in models 2 and 5.

extremism declines as turnout increases. Voter polarisation is found to have a positive and statistically significant effect on party extremism. Accordingly, parties adopt more extreme positions when polarisation was high in the previous election, but higher turnout in the previous election weakens parties' responses to voter polarisation. These findings give support to my main hypothesis, which suggests that parties adopt more extreme positions in response to higher voter polarisation and that this effect is conditioned by voters' propensity to abstain. The interaction effect remains statistically significant when controls are added in the third, fourth, and fifth models. The size of the coefficient, however, becomes smaller. For example, the coefficient for the interaction in the first model, which includes country fixed effects, changes from -0.057 to -0.052 when controls are added in the third model. The size of the coefficient changes to -0.040 when party fixed effects are used instead of country fixed effects. An explanation for why the interaction effect becomes weaker in model 4 is that unit fixed effects (i.e. party) eliminate much of the cross-sectional variance by focusing instead on variation within units.

The results from model 5, which includes a lagged dependent variable, are similar to the alternative models. The coefficient of the interaction effect is -0.037 and is thus the smallest estimate compared to the previous models. To facilitate the interpretation of the interaction effect, figure 4.3 shows marginal effects of voter polarisation on party extremism for different levels of turnout. The figures clearly demonstrate that the effect of voter polarisation on party extremism is positive when turnout was low in the previous election and that the effect of voter polarisation decreases as turnout increases. Voter polarisation has no effect on party extremism at higher levels of turnout. According to the estimates from my different models, the effect of voter polarisation is no longer

Figure 4.3: Marginal effects of polarisation on party extremism



Note: Fitted values are presented with ninety-five per cent confidence intervals. Tick marks along the x-axis are the distribution of the turnout variable.

statistically significant when turnout in the previous election is between 75 and 80 per cent.

Consistent with my expectations, I find some evidence that parties adopt more moderate positions when they were the party of the prime minister at the time of the election. Similar to Ezrow (2008), I find not much evidence that electoral disproportionality or the effective number of parties affect party extremism. In model 5, however, an increase in the effective number of parties induces parties to adopt more extreme positions, which is consistent with findings from previous studies (see Andrews and Money 2009; Curini and Hino

2012). Overall, my findings provide strong support for my argument that voter polarisation leads parties to adopt more extreme positions and that the effect is moderated by voter turnout.

Table 4.2: Party system dispersion in eleven Western European countries, 1977-2016

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Party system dispersion _{t-1}		0.443*** (0.098)		0.457*** (0.074)
Turnout _{t-1}	0.087** (0.039)	0.076** (0.037)	0.081** (0.039)	0.082** (0.037)
Polarisation _{t-1}	3.658** (1.152)	2.749* (1.436)	3.373** (1.520)	2.879** (1.421)
Disproportionality _{t-1}			-0.008 (0.012)	0.008 (0.006)
Effective number of parties _{t-1}			0.071* (0.037)	0.039 (0.026)
Polarisation _{t-1} × Turnout _{t-1}	-0.045** (0.019)	-0.034* (0.018)	-0.040** (0.019)	-0.036** (0.018)
Constant	-6.401** (3.113)	-5.723** (2.912)	-6.186** (3.085)	-6.315** (2.874)
Lagged dependent variable		✓		✓
Country fixed effects	✓		✓	
Decade fixed effects	✓		✓	
R-squared: within	0.165		0.201	
R-squared: between	0.024		0.200	
R-squared: overall	0.097	0.356	0.215	0.383
Observations	102	102	102	102

Note: p* < 0.10, p** < 0.05, p*** < 0.01, two-tailed tests. Standard errors in parentheses. Panel-corrected standard errors in models 2 and 5.

The empirical findings are robust to different identifying assumptions, as the estimates from the fixed effects models and the ones from models that

include a lagged dependent variable are similar. As a further check, I show in table 4.2 that my estimates of the interaction effect between voter polarisation and turnout are robust when my dependent variable is weighted party system dispersion. The findings provide additional support for my hypothesis and show that different measurements of the dependent variable and different model specifications lead to the same conclusions. Another expectation is that the findings are stronger in countries with lower average turnout because these countries exhibit greater variation in turnout. Indeed, I find some evidence that the interaction effect between turnout and polarisation is stronger in countries with lower average turnout, but the difference between low and high turnout countries is small (see table C.6 in the appendix).

While the marginal effects plots in figure 4.3 clarify the conditions under which the predicted effects are statistically significant, it is important to also address the substantive significance of these estimated effects. I consider the marginal effect of a typical increase in voter polarisation on parties' predicted positions at different levels of turnout. In my dataset the mean and median change in voter polarisation between two consecutive elections is 0.10. When voter turnout is 60 percent, the marginal effect of a 0.10 increase in voter polarisation is associated with an increase in party extremism of at least 0.12, which represents a seven percent increase relative to the entire range of the party extremism variable. In contrast, when voter turnout is 70 percent, the marginal effect of a 0.10 increase in voter polarisation on party extremism is 0.07, which represents a four percent increase. The marginal effect of voter polarisation on party extremism is therefore almost halved by a ten percent increase in voter turnout. As turnout reaches 80 percent, higher voter polarisation is no longer associated with more extreme policy positions.

I can illustrate the substantive significance of my findings further by looking at a concrete example from the Netherlands. The ideological polarisation of the Dutch electorate increased by the same amount before the 2003 and 2012 elections, but voter turnout differed across both elections. In 2010 turnout was 75 percent, which is four percent below the national average in my dataset, and an increase in voter polarisation of 0.10 led to a 17 percent increase in party system dispersion in the following election. All parties except for the Christian Union adopted a more radical policy position compared to the previous election. In 2002 turnout was 79 percent, which is the mean turnout in my dataset, and an increase in voter polarisation by approximately 0.10 led to an increase in party extremism of only six percent in the following election. While the VVD and CDA adopted more radical positions, other parties either adopted more moderate positions or did not change their positions. The example demonstrates that voter polarisation can have substantial effects on parties' ideological positions, particularly at lower levels of voter turnout.

The empirical analysis has shown that parties adopt more extreme positions in response to higher voter polarisation, and that the effect is moderated by turnout. The finding is explained by my theoretical argument that parties have more to gain from responding to voter polarisation when voters have a higher propensity to abstain, as adopting more extreme positions helps to mobilise core constituents. While voters' propensity to abstain is exogenous in my theoretical analysis, voter turnout may be endogenous to party system dispersion. If voter turnout is endogenous to party system dispersion, my model estimates will be biased. I therefore test whether party system dispersion in the previous election influences turnout in the current election.

Evidence from previous studies on the relationship between party system

dispersion and turnout is mixed. Steiner and Martin (2012), for example, find that party polarisation has a negative effect on turnout, even though the effect is small. In related work, Ezrow and Xezonakis (2016) find no evidence that party polarisation affects turnout (see also Cancela and Geys 2016). I test for the potential endogeneity of turnout by regressing turnout in the current election on party system dispersion in the previous election. The results are reported in table C.2 in the appendix, and they show that party system dispersion does not lead to higher turnout.

I therefore conclude that estimates of the interaction effect between turnout and voter polarisation in table 4.1 are unlikely to be biased, as I find no evidence that turnout is endogenous to party system dispersion. Although parties can affect individual turnout decisions in my theoretical analysis, aggregate turnout appears to depend more strongly on factors unrelated to party system dispersion. This finding is consistent with previous empirical research that shows a strong positive correlation between party system dispersion and voters' likelihood to turn out (see Wessels and Schmitt 2008; Brockington 2009; Lefkofridi, Giger and Gallego 2014), while there is less evidence that party system dispersion also affects aggregate turnout (Ezrow and Xozonakis 2016). The fact that aggregate turnout is exogenous to party system dispersion thus does not mean that parties' policy positioning is ineffective at mobilising core constituents.

4.5 Discussion and Conclusion

This article has emphasised the importance of abstention for understanding when parties' policy positions respond to the ideological polarisation of voters. I have argued that parties face incentives to respond to voter polarisation

by adopting more extreme policy positions, and that these incentives become stronger when voters have a higher propensity to abstain. If the electorate is highly polarised, parties risk alienating their non-moderate core constituents when adopting moderate policy positions. This risk is magnified if voters have a higher propensity to abstain, as in this case moderate party positioning will alienate a larger share of non-moderate core constituents. An empirical analysis of party positions between 1977 and 2016 in eleven Western European democracies strongly supports this argument. I find that parties adopt more extreme positions when voter polarisation was higher in the previous election, but the effect declines as turnout increases. The effect of voter polarisation disappears when turnout is at least 75 per cent.

Previous theoretical work has predicted that parties become more extreme when the electorate is more ideologically polarised (see Downs 1957; Cox 1990, Merrill and Adams 2002), but recent empirical findings present conflicting evidence. While Ezrow (2007) finds support for the voter polarisation effect, other empirical studies report that no such relationship exists (Dalton 2008; Adams, Green and Milazzo 2012). By emphasising the importance of abstention, I have shown that voter polarisation should induce parties to become more extreme only when the threat of abstention is large. Adams, Green and Milazzo (2012), for example, find that the British Labour and Conservative parties become more moderate between 1987 and 2001 even though the electorate did not depolarise during that time. Consistent with my arguments, I note that turnout in the UK was relatively high until it dropped below sixty percent in 2001, which prompted both parties to adopt more extreme positions in the following election. Higher abstention thus increases the effect of voter polarisation on parties' policy positions.

My findings should be of interest to the study of representation and party competition. While much attention has been given to factors that explain median voter representation (see Powell 2009; Adams et al. 2004; McDonald and Budge 2005; Adams, Haupt and Stoll 2009; Ward, Ezrow and Dorussen 2011; Schumacher, de Vries and Vis 2013), I focus instead on whether parties adopt more extreme positions when voters are more ideologically polarised. Some scholars have raised concerns that increased party extremism decreases satisfaction with democracy (Ezrow and Xezonakis 2011) or that it reduces voters' reliance on substantive information to guide their policy opinions (Druckman, Peterson and Slothuus 2013). Nevertheless, I suggest that my findings offer a positive outlook to representative democracy, as party systems should represent not only the preferences of the median voter but also the diversity of voter preferences (Pitkin 1967, Cox 1997, Ezrow 2007; Andrews and Money 2009). When parties present non-moderate policy positions, voters have more meaningful choices. This leads to stronger party attachments, more ideologically consistent voting, and greater electoral stability (Lachat 2008; Lupu 2015; Jansen, Evans and de Graaf 2013).

This article also contributes to the study of representation by showing that the threat of abstention can motivate parties to represent a wider range of policy options. Although previous research has acknowledged the ability of parties to mobilise voters via policy appeals, the predominant view is still that low turnout among working class individuals fosters unequal representation (see Lijphart 1997; Schlozman, Verba and Brady 2012; Peters and Ensink 2015; Fenzl 2018). I challenge this view and suggest that abstention from alienation induces parties to improve representation of their core constituents.

The findings raise interesting questions for future research. While this

article has demonstrated that higher voter abstention makes parties more responsive to voter polarisation, future research should investigate the effect of party polarisation on individual level turnout. My analysis presupposes that parties adopt more radical positions to mobilise their alienated non-moderate core constituents, and it would be interesting to examine whether voters respond to parties' policy strategies. Moreover, this study only considers the effects of polarisation and abstention on party extremism on a dominant left-right policy dimension. Future research should therefore explore the robustness of my empirical findings when considering additional issue dimensions. Future research should also extend the scope of this study beyond Western European countries and consider multiparty democracies in Eastern Europe and across the world. Nevertheless, this study marks an important step forward in the understanding of party representation in multiparty democracies and the influence of voter polarisation and abstention.

5 | Conclusion

Representative democracy sometimes works in curious ways. When in May 2010 the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats agreed to form the first coalition in the United Kingdom since the Second World War, Prime Minister David Cameron acknowledged that the new government could mark a historic shift in British politics. Would the two parties be able to set aside their differences and work together to achieve common policy goals? Would the parties at the same time be able to maintain their distinct policy profiles and avoid being punished for ‘selling out’ their core principles? How would the public perceive the new coalition government?

That these questions mattered to the coalition parties became apparent through their communications with the public. In the now-famous press conference in Downing Street’s rose garden following the election, Prime Minister David Cameron embraced the coalition with the Liberal Democrats as an inspiring and new form of consensual policy-making, saying he was leading a Liberal Conservative government. The shift in tone was remarkable, given that only days before the election the Conservative Party leadership warned against the dangers of a hung parliamentary party, “behind-closed-doors politics, indecision, weak government, a paralysed economy and yet another election within the calendar year” (Wintour 2010).

During the early stages of the government term, the coalition parties were

also keen to signal to voters that common ground had been found on the salient policy issues, such as European integration or achieving a balanced budget. But during the later stages of the Conservative and Liberal Democrats coalition we observe yet another shift in tone. By 2012, the coalition parties increasingly engaged in public disputes, and Prime Minister David Cameron even began to organise exclusive cabinet meetings with Conservative ministers who would meet before the full cabinet (Bennister and Heffernan 2015). In response to several high-profile policy announcements by Cameron, the then Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg openly criticised Cameron and claimed that the Liberal Democrats had been decisive in blocking Conservative policies (Cutts and Russell 2015). The shift in communication during the second half of the government term illustrates the parties' electoral need to be publicly seen to disagree with each other lest they be seen as 'selling out' their core principles.

The example of the Conservative and Liberal Democrats coalition in the UK emphasises that the party leaders were noticeably concerned about questions relating to how to find policy compromise without diluting their party's distinct policy profiles. In recent years, these questions have also sparked a growing scholarly interest in the relationship between coalition governments and representative democracy. One strand of the literature, for example, argues that, in an effort to avoid being punished at the polls, coalition parties signal to their supporters that they have not strayed from their core principles and electoral commitments (Martin and Vanberg 2008; Sagarzazu and Klüver 2017; Fortunato 2018; Bernardi and Adams 2019). Another strand of this literature counters that voters tend to ignore such signals and instead form their perceptions of parties by relying on the easily accessible and highly informative coalition heuristic (Fortunato and Stevenson 2013; Fortunato and Adams 2015;

Adams, Ezrow and Wlezien 2016). This begs the question: why would a party choose to enter a coalition government if it expects to be punished at the polls by an electorate that ignores its policy signals? It is precisely this apparent disconnect in the literature between parties' strategies (e.g. attempts to publicly differentiate themselves) and voters' responses (e.g. lack of attention to party signals) that inspired the topic for this dissertation.

In reality, the interplay between voters and parties is more complex than previous work in this field lets on. For example, voters' responses to the coalition formation between the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats were characterised by a surprising degree of heterogeneity. While partisan supporters of a coalition party perceived both parties as adopting more distinctive issue positions, other voters saw the parties as converging on the same positions. The existing literature does not provide a satisfactory explanation for why voters update their perceptions of coalition parties' issue positions in such a heterogeneous and even conflicting manner. This dissertation extends previous research by exploring not only the heterogeneity of voters' responses in two different contexts, but also its implications for mass-elite linkages. The first article studies the heterogeneity of voters' responses to a rise in issue salience, while the second article examines the heterogeneity of voters' responses to coalition formation. Given that voters respond in heterogeneous ways, the third article re-examines to what extent voters can motivate parties to adjust their ideological positions.

While the three studies presented in this dissertation were designed to stand on their own and to make individual contributions to different literatures, the studies nevertheless contribute to answering two broader questions about the top-down and bottom-up processes of representation: First, what explains differences in how distinct partisan and non-partisan voter groups update their

political attitudes and perceptions of parties' issue positions? Second, how do parties position themselves to respond effectively to an electorate that consists of distinct voter groups? Finding answers to these questions is important for gaining a better understanding of the interplay between parties' policy positioning and voters' policy preferences during a time of heightened electoral volatility, fragmentation and affective polarisation.

I contribute in this dissertation by showing that accounting for differences between distinct partisan and non-partisan voter groups enables us to answer such questions and improve our understanding of several important political phenomena. For example, I showed in the first two studies that partisan and non-partisan voters differ in how they update their political attitudes and party perceptions in response to heightened issue salience and coalition formation. This approach is novel insofar as it does not rely on implicit assumptions about voters processing information and updating their political attitudes, perceptions and behaviours in the same way, irrespective of their partisan attachments.

Note that I do not claim that standard theories of representation and party competition assume that voters are homogeneous in all regards or that voters have the same policy preferences. Rather, this dissertation challenges common assumptions about voters being homogeneous with regard to how they process information, update their political attitudes and perceptions, and maximise their utility when deciding who to vote for. Scholars of representation and party competition have begun to relax such voter homogeneity assumptions to challenge existing knowledge and produce important novel findings (see Adams, Merrill and Grofman 2005; Ezrow et al. 2011; Ezrow, Tavits and Homola 2014; Adams, Ezrow and Somer-Topcu 2014; Lavine, Johnston and Steenbergen 2012; Johnston, Lavine and Federico 2017). My dissertation extends this research by

further integrating partisanship into existing models of representation and party competition.

5.1 Gaps in the Existing Literature

The first study of this dissertation examines why voters update their perceptions of issue proximity with their preferred party, and one key focus is the moderating role of partisan attachments. The literature typically assumes that voters' perceptions of issue proximity are responsive to changes in parties' policy positions. But so far the literature offers little explanation for why some voters update their perceptions of issue proximity with their preferred party following a change in issue salience in the absence of change in parties' policy positions. Dinas, Hartman and van Spanje (2016) explain that spatial models, which are based on Downs's (1957) spatial representation of party competition, have dominated the issue voting literature. These spatial models posit that voters form perceptions of where parties stand on different policy issues and subsequently choose the party that most closely represents their ideal positions. Changes in the parties' perceived policy positions are attributed to rational updating, and such changes supposedly influence which party voters will support, but not vice versa. The Downsian approach to political representation assumes that all voters employ the same proximity-based policy metric to evaluate parties, and hence it attributes no significant role to partisan attachments that give rise to non-proximity-based evaluations (Adams, Merrill and Grofman 2005).

My first article suggests that standard spatial models are ill-equipped to explain why some voters update their perceptions of issue proximity with their preferred party in the absence of party policy shifts. They are ill-equipped insofar as they disregard the moderating influence of partisan attachments. In the

article I show that an increase in issue salience can reinforce voters' pre-existing attachments to the issue-owning party, which subsequently leads these voters to feel ideologically closer to their party. The findings suggest that perceptions of issue proximity are to some degree an expression of how close citizens feel to a party, rather than the only criterion for deciding which party to vote for (see also Evans and Andersen 2004). The study contributes to the first overarching question of this dissertation and shows that parties can trigger heterogeneous responses among their partisan supporters and other voters by emphasising issues on which they enjoy a strong reputation. Voters will perceive their preferred party as ideologically closer if the party has ownership of an issue that becomes salient, whereas voters who have no pre-existing attachment to the party will not update their perceptions of issue proximity.

The second article of this dissertation examines how voters track the policy positions of parties after they join a coalition government. There is a growing body of research which looks at this question by focusing on the role of institutional heuristics. Specifically, the existing literature argues that voters update their perceptions of parties' ideological positions based on governing coalition arrangements (Fortunato and Stevenson 2013; Fortunato and Adams 2015; Adams, Ezrow and Wlezien 2016). According to this perspective, voters interpret coalition participation as a sign that the coalition parties will engage in wide-ranging policy compromise and therefore perceive the parties as converging on more similar ideological positions than the left-right tone of their manifestos would suggest. One important implication of this research is that parties face strong disincentives to join a coalition government as a junior coalition party, as junior coalition parties will disproportionately be perceived as 'selling out' their core principles and will therefore be punished at the polls (Fortunato and

Adams 2015).

Existing work on the influence of coalition heuristics on the perceived positions of coalition parties has so far not considered the moderating role of partisan attachments. But this omission is surprising because it is well established that partisan motivated reasoning leads voters to actively seek out information that reinforces and dismiss information that contradicts positive beliefs about their party (e.g. how influential and principled one's party is). Moreover, partisan motivated reasoning leads voters to attribute greater credibility to information coming from their own party than to information from other sources (Campbell et al. 1960; Taber and Lodge 2006; Bolsen, Druckman and Cook 2014; Leeper and Slothuus 2014). The second article of this study therefore considers the role of partisanship to understand how voters update their perceptions of parties' issue positions after coalition formation.

In doing so, the study contributes to answering the first overarching question of this dissertation. Namely, parties trigger heterogeneous responses among their partisan supporters and other voters when joining a coalition government. Partisan motivated reasoning leads supporters of a coalition party to be more receptive to the coalition parties' attempts to publicly differentiate themselves, and as a result, they will perceive the coalition parties as adopting more distinctive issue positions over the duration of the coalition government. In contrast, other voters rely more heavily on the coalition heuristic and see the coalition parties as converging on more similar issue positions. By taking into account the influence of partisanship, my article offers a more nuanced explanation of how voters track the policy positions of parties after they join a coalition government.

While the first two articles examined how challenging the voter homogeneity assumption improves our understanding of top-down processes of representation, the third article explores its consequences for the bottom-up processes of representation. In other words, how do parties position themselves to respond effectively to an electorate that consists of distinctive voter groups who are not represented by the median voter? The article extends previous research which stresses the primacy of the median voter and studies representation of public opinion as if the public were a unitary actor. According to this view, voters evaluate parties on the basis of a proximity-based policy metric, and parties position themselves so as to maximise their vote share or probability of participating in government (Downs 1957).

The voter homogeneity assumption and the focus on the median voter have helped scholars develop parsimonious explanations of party positioning and the influence of globalisation (Ezrow and Hellwig 2014), party organisation (Schumacher, de Vries and Vis 2013), electoral rules (Powell 2000; Huber and Powell 1994), electoral performance (Adams et al. 2004) or uncertainty (Budge 1994). Ezrow et al. (2011) note that theoretical and empirical studies of representation characterise mainstream parties as being centre-oriented because of the widespread belief that adopting positions close to the median voter serves vote- and office-maximising goals. The authors argue that in parliamentary systems adopting a centrist position strengthens a party's post-election coalition negotiation position and also increases the party's leverage to pull the governing coalition's policy in its preferred direction. Adams and Merrill (2009) also posit that parties adopt more centrist positions because they expect that the median parliamentary party will be able to implement its policy position.

The third article of this dissertation suggests that the focus on the median voter and the assumption that all voters are equally policy-oriented does not help us explain why parties sometimes face strategic incentives to adopt positions that diverge from the median voter's policy preferences. This is an important question because the quality of democratic representation depends not only how well parties represent the preferences of the median voter, but also on whether voters can find representatives who advocate similar preferences (Ezrow 2007; Cox 1997; Pitkin 1967). While representing the diversity of public opinion is normatively desirable in itself, there is also evidence that parties can mobilise voters if they offer meaningful policy alternatives (Hobolt and Hoerner 2019). By integrating partisanship into spatial models of party competition, I am able to explain under which conditions parties face incentives to adopt more diverse ideological positions.

5.2 Contributions

The dissertation contributes to three broader debates in the literature. The first debate is about the relationship between issue ownership theory and the Downsian view of politics. The second debate concerns the effect of partisan attachments on voters' perceptions of policy compromise between coalition parties. The third debate is about representation and the role of the median voter.

Issue Ownership Theory and Spatial Models of Party Competition

While issue ownership theory posits that voters choose a party based on evaluations of its reputation or competence on salient issues, the Downsian view of politics suggests that voters choose a party based on evaluations of its issue

positions. According to this view, voters employ a proximity-based policy metric and evaluate a party more positively as that party's position moves closer to their position (Adams 2016). Both theoretical approaches have different implications for party strategies, as in the former, parties attract voters via their policy emphases and not via their policy positions (Budge 1993; Budge and Farlie 1983; Downs 1957).

Issue ownership theory and spatial models of representation have developed independently of one another, and as a result, existing research has paid little attention to the potential overlap between both theoretical approaches. A notable exception is a study by Green and Hobolt (2008), which shows that as parties converge ideologically competence considerations become more important than ideological positions to voters in British elections. Nevertheless, we still know surprisingly little about the relationship between issue positions and issue salience. In this regard, Neundorf and Adams (2018) encourage future research to investigate the relationship between issue salience and issue positions, suggesting that issue positions and perceptions of party positions may be endogenous to issue salience or parties' issue emphases (see also Adams 2016).

This is an important gap in the literature because the Downsian view of politics assumes that parties compete for votes among an issue-oriented electorate and that voters have exogenous issue positions and perceptions of where parties stand on these issues. As a consequence, the quality of democratic representation tends to be judged by the perceived congruence between voters' positions and parties' or governments' positions at a given point in time. Some research, for example, focuses on the role of electoral systems to explain differences in the ideological congruence between citizens and governments (Golder and Stramski 2010; Blais and Bodet 2006; Lupu, Selios and Warner 2017; Golder

and Ferland 2017). Other research examines the role of party characteristics to understand differences in the association between concurrent shifts in parties' and voters' positions (Ferland 2018; Adams et al. 2006a; Ezrow et al. 2011). But Powell (2009) notes that citizens' perceptions of congruence with parties may be subject to rationalisation of non-ideologically based support or projection of their own beliefs (see also Merrill, Grofman and Adams 2002). A challenge for scholars of representation and responsiveness is therefore that we currently have a limited understanding of how parties can influence voters' perceptions of issue congruence.

This dissertation explores the possibility that a party can (strategically) alter the public's perceptions of its issue positions and their supporters' own issue positions through selective issue emphasis. My first article reports evidence that an issue salience shock can bring voters ideologically closer to the issue-owning party if they already support the party. An increase in the salience of an issue reinforces voters' pre-existing attachments to the issue-owning party, and a strengthening of partisan attachments leads these voters to perceive their party as more congruent (on less salient issues). Moreover, I find that on principled or social issues, such as euthanasia, voters become more congruent with their party by projecting their own position onto their party. But on pragmatic or economic issues, such as redistribution, voters become more congruent with their party by adopting the party's position as their own.

These findings have important implications for the study of representation and party competition. Namely, they show that issue positions and issue salience are intimately related. By combining elements of spatial models and the issue ownership approach, I have shown that perceptions of issue proximity are influenced by whether or not a party has ownership of a salient issue.

Scholars of party competition should therefore acknowledge that the perceived ideological proximity between voters and parties is influenced by issue ownership and salience. By emphasising its owned issues, a party may therefore be able to induce its supporters to shift their positions towards the party, or to shift their perceived position of the party towards them. Alternatively, my findings raise the possibility that dramatic political events can induce partisan motivated reasoning and thereby influence how voters form political opinions and perceptions of parties' positions on unrelated issues. Scholars of representation should acknowledge these findings because they imply that shocks to issue salience can insulate decision-making from informed consideration and substantive arguments. The findings are troubling because representative democracy depends to a large degree on voters' ability to update their political opinions and perceptions in an informed manner.

Party Attachments Influence Voters' Perceptions of Policy Compromise by Coalition Parties

My dissertation also contributes to a large and growing literature on the effects of partisan attachments. This literature treats partisan attachments as a stable psychological bond or social identity that raises 'a perceptual screen through which the individual sees what is favorable to his partisan orientation' (Campbell et al. 1960: 133). Partisan motivated reasoning thus refers to the tendency of individuals to interpret information through the lens of their partisan identification or attachment, seek out information that reinforces prior beliefs about their party, or reject information that challenges such beliefs (Campbell et al. 1960; Taber and Lodge 2006; Bolsen, Druckman and Cook 2014; Leeper and Slothuus 2014). The literature on partisan attachments shows that partisan mo-

tivated reasoning influences voters' perceptions of economic conditions (Bartels 2002; Evans and Andersen 2006), political controversies (Wagner, Tarlov and Vivyan 2014; Solaz, de Vries and de Geus 2018), government performance and responsibility (Tilley and Hobolt 2011; Thomson 2011), and key political events such as wars (Gaines et al. 2007). Other research shows that the perceived ideological proximity between voters and parties is to some degree an expression of how close voters feel to a party (Evans and Andersen 2004, Merrill, Adams and Grofman 2002).

My dissertation extends previous research on the effects of partisan attachments by focusing on voters' perceptions of policy compromise between coalition parties. I show in the second article that partisans of a coalition party perceive the coalition parties as adopting more disparate issue positions during later stages of their tenure in government, whereas other voters appear to rely on the coalition heuristic to update their perceptions. Voters who do not identify with a coalition party rely on the coalition heuristic insofar as they expect the coalition parties to engage in wide-ranging policy compromise; these voters will therefore perceive the coalition parties as converging on more similar issue positions. I also find that the effect of partisan motivated reasoning on voters' perceptions of the coalition parties increases with the strength of voters' partisan attachments and attention to politics.

The finding that partisan attachments influence voters' perceptions of policy compromise between coalition parties is important for the study of representation, party competition and coalition politics. Coalition governments are the norm in European parliamentary systems, and party systems are becoming increasingly fragmented across Europe (Chiaramonte and Emanuele 2015). Party system fragmentation has increased the need for parties to form new and

unusual coalition governments, including grand coalitions between the largest parties of opposing political ideologies in Germany, Iceland, Italy, Austria and the Netherlands. Existing research on coalition politics, which focuses on the role of coalition-based heuristics, suggests that parties, particularly niche parties, have strong disincentives to join coalition governments as a junior coalition partner because the public will invariably see them as ‘selling out’ their core principles and therefore punish them at the polls (Fortunato and Adams 2015). In support, Adams et al. (2006a) posit that niche parties will alienate their core supporters if they are seen to moderate their policy insofar as niche party supporters are highly policy-focused (see also Kitschelt 1994).

The findings of my second article differ in that I find no evidence that supporters of coalition parties perceive the coalition parties as converging on similar issue positions during their tenure in government. Contrary to previous research, I find that coalition parties can succeed at differentiating themselves from their cabinet partners in the eyes of their supporters and politically attentive voters. The findings imply that parties, including niche parties, do not necessarily have to shy away from joining coalitions out of fear that they will be perceived as ‘selling out’ their principles. As long as they have a stable partisan base or voters are attentive to politics, junior coalition parties’ differentiation efforts can help them to escape the policy shadow of the prime ministers’ party. By extending the study of partisan attachments to the context of coalition politics, this dissertation offers new insights into the question of how voters track the policy positions of parties that join a coalition government.

Representation and the Focus on the Median Voter

This dissertation also contributes to the study of representation, which has largely focused on the influence of the median voter. As previously mentioned, the literature on representation and responsiveness tends to implicitly assume that voters are homogeneous insofar as they employ a proximity-based policy metric to evaluate parties (Adams 2016). As a consequence, much of existing work on representation and responsiveness has examined the conditions under which parties or governments are more congruent with or responsive to the preferences of the median voter (see Golder and Stramski 2010; Blais and Bodet 2006; Lupu, Selios and Warner 2017; Ferland 2018; Golder and Ferland 2017; Adams et al. 2006a; Adams, Haupt and Stoll 2009; Pontusson and Rueda 2010; Ward, Ezrow and Dorussen 2011; Powell and Vanberg 2000; Powell 2009; Powell 2013; Golder and Lloyd 2014). Yet there are several notable studies that explore representational biases in favour of certain voter subgroups, such as high income earners (Gilens 2005; Bartels 2008), business leaders and experts (Jacobs and Page 2005), opinion leaders (Adams and Ezrow 2009), or the highly educated (Soroka and Wlezien 2010). My third article extends this research by asking how parties should position themselves to appeal to an electorate that consists of different types of voters who are not represented by the median voter.

In the article I adapt a spatial model by Merrill and Adams (2002) by allowing multiple parties to compete for votes among an electorate that consists of partisan voters, who are motivated by policy but also display some degree of party loyalty, and swing voters, who are only policy-oriented. In the spatial model, parties mobilise voters via their policy appeals so that voters may abstain if no party is sufficiently close to their policy position.

I show that modelling a heterogeneous electorate, which consists of partisan and non-partisan voters, has important implications for representation and party competition. One implication that emerges from this spatial model is that parties will not be exclusively motivated to respond to the preferences of the median voter. Instead, parties may face a trade-off between mobilising their non-moderate partisan supporters and persuading moderate swing voters. This trade-off depends on how polarised the public are and on voters' propensity to abstain. Incorporating partisanship into the spatial model of party competition enables me to examine the conditions under which parties face incentives to adopt more diverse ideological positions.

The main argument of my third article is that vote-maximising parties have incentives to adopt more extreme ideological positions when the electorate becomes more ideologically polarised (see also Ezrow 2007). The reason for this is that by adopting moderate positions, parties will prompt their non-moderate supporters to sit out the election. Importantly, however, this risk is conditioned by voters' propensity to abstain. A higher propensity to abstain means that parties alienate a larger share of their supporters when adopting a moderate position. If voters have a low propensity to abstain, parties will alienate fewer of their non-moderate supporters when adopting a more centrist position.

An empirical analysis of parties' programmatic positions in eleven Western European countries between 1977 and 2016 provides strong support for these arguments. I find that party systems become more ideologically polarised in response to higher voter polarisation, but only if abstention was high in the previous election. The findings are important because they imply that parties' ideological positions respond to the diversity of public opinion. Moreover, the findings imply that the threat of abstention among non-moderate citizens can

induce parties to represent a wider range of policy preferences. As such, abstention can serve as a mechanism of accountability, whereas previous work looks at abstention as a failure of representative democracy for fostering unequal representation (Peters and Ensink 2015; Schlozman, Verba and Brady 2012). Overall, my third article contributes to the literature on representation and party competition by showing that taking the heterogeneity of the electorate seriously can help us understand how parties navigate the trade-off between representing different types of voters and why parties sometimes adopt more moderate or more extreme positions.

5.3 Normative Implications

The findings of this dissertation have important normative implications. One implication relates to the view that the quality of representative democracy depends on the degree to which the electorate is able, first, to choose representatives based on the policy positions they advocate, and second, to hold elected representatives to account for their actions in office (Dalton, Farrell and McAllister 2011). According to this view, the fear of electoral defeat provides strong incentives for parties to act as faithful representatives to their constituents. Spatial models of representation and party competition tend to rely on the assumption that voters act in line with the normative view of representation. Namely, voters are assumed to follow political developments, update their perceptions in a rational and informed manner, and vote for parties that best represent their views.

But in reality, voters regularly act in a manner that can hardly be described as rational or policy-oriented. Across Western Europe, voters are sorting themselves into political tribes to a great extent, and they therefore experience

their political environment in diametrically opposed ways. These tribes can be organised along traditional partisan lines, or they can be structured around salient political events such as Brexit (see Hobolt, Leeper and Tilley 2019). As I have argued in this dissertation, political tribalism has important consequences for the interplay between voters and parties.

On the one hand, I have shown that voters update their political attitudes and perceptions of parties differently depending on their partisan orientations. The pervasiveness of partisan motivated reasoning is problematic because it reduces voters' reliance on substantive information to guide their policy opinions and voting preferences (Druckman, Peterson and Slothuus 2013). Blind partisan loyalty prevents voters from holding their parties to account, thereby undermining parties' incentives to act as faithful representatives of their constituents (Achen and Bartels 2016). But blind partisan loyalty also helps to entrench societal divisions because partisan motivated reasoning leads voters to interpret political information or events in diametrically opposed ways. Not only do voters tend to perceive their preferred party as more ideologically congruent (assimilation bias), while viewing other parties as less ideologically compatible (contrast bias) (Merrill, Grofman and Adams 2001); but recent work on negative partisanship even suggests that partisan affiliations *against* rival parties or societal groups can be just as powerful in shaping voters' perceptions and attitudes as their partisan affiliations *with* their party or group (Abramowitz and Webster 2016, 2018; Hobolt, Leeper and Tilley 2019). It requires building broad political alliances to bridge deeply entrenched societal divisions, but this can be a challenge when political discourse is shaped by tribalism and affective polarisation.

On the other hand, I have shown that the presence of partisan attachments does not fully remove parties' incentives to respond to public opinion. In fact, partisan attachments can help strengthen the links between parties and their supporters as long as parties are concerned about abstention. The threat of abstention from alienation prompts parties to try to mobilise their supporters via policy appeals. Consequently, abstention can act as a mechanism of accountability in periods when partisan voters are unlikely to sanction their party by voting for a rival party. One important implication of my third article is that abstention leads parties to adopt a wider range of policy positions if the electorate becomes more ideologically polarised.

In sum, I have argued that the presence of partisan attachments can both strengthen and undermine representative democracy. Partisan attachments stabilise the representative links between parties and their supporters, but blind partisan loyalty undermines political discourse and entrenches societal divisions. Representative democracy is likely to flourish when voters display a healthy balance of critical loyalty to their preferred party and thus approximate a higher standard of democratic citizenship (Lavine, Johnston and Steenbergen 2012).

5.4 Limitations

The aim of this dissertation was to focus on the role of partisanship to better understand the bottom-up and top-down processes of democratic representation. I have argued that parties induce heterogeneous responses among their partisan supporters and other voters, and that this has important implications for how parties position themselves. Testing my arguments empirically, however, has forced me to address the trade-off between internal and external validity. Internal validity refers to the confidence with which we can infer that a relationship

between two variables is causal, whereas external validity refers to the confidence with which we can extrapolate the presumed causal relationship across different settings (Cook and Campbell 1979).

The first two articles of this dissertation emphasise internal validity insofar as they test the mechanisms of my arguments in greater detail. In the first article I leverage a natural experiment from the Netherlands to test whether partisan attachments moderate voters' responses to heightened issue salience. In the second article I use the case of the surprising coalition between the British Conservatives and Liberal Democrats to examine how partisan attachments influence voters' perceptions of policy compromise by coalition parties. Both cases enabled me not only to study the mechanisms by which partisan attachments influence voters' responses but also to rule out several alternative explanations. Consequently, the research designs and unique datasets of the first two articles helped to strengthen the internal validity of my arguments. Nevertheless, future research is needed to examine to what degree these findings can be generalised to other contexts.

The third article of this dissertation emphasises external validity because it tests my arguments about the effects of voter polarisation and abstention in the context of eleven Western European countries over five decades. But the generalisability of the findings comes to some degree at the expense of internal validity. While my theoretical arguments are derived from a simple spatial model of party competition, I do not examine the specific mechanisms that lead parties to adjust their policy decisions in response to a higher threat of abstention or increased voter polarisation. Future research should examine these mechanisms in more detail to provide additional confidence in the findings presented in this study. For example, it would be interesting to examine whether

voters behave in the way specified by the spatial model and are indeed responsive to parties' policy strategies. It would also be interesting to further explore potential differences in the way the presumed causal processes operate across different countries. The article presents several robustness checks to rule out alternative explanations for the findings, but more work is needed to better understand the mechanisms of my theoretical arguments.

Another challenge I have encountered in this dissertation relates to the difficulty of disentangling the dynamic relationship between voters' preferences and turnout decisions, on the one hand, and parties' positions, on the other hand. I argue in my third article that parties are responsive to the threat of abstention and the ideological polarisation of the electorate, but I also acknowledge that the causal flow might be the reverse. That is, voters may sometimes adopt their preferred party's positions as their own, or parties may mobilise voters via their policy appeals. Both possibilities challenge the presumed unidirectional nature of the relationship between voters' turnout decisions or preferences and parties' positions. As a result, it is difficult to draw causal inferences from a positive cross-sectional relationship between party positions, on the one hand, and voter polarisation or abstention, on the other hand.

As Adams and Somer-Topcu (2009) note, there is no perfect way to overcome these causal inference problems when estimating the reciprocal influences between parties and voters. Nevertheless, I confront this problem in two ways. First, I estimate a model in which parties react at the current election to voter polarisation and turnout at the previous election. The focus on parties' retrospective policy appeals is also theoretically justified by the fact that developing party manifestos is time-consuming (see also Adams and Somer-Topcu 2009). Second, I find no evidence that voter's ideological polarisation or aggre-

gate turnout are influenced by parties' ideological positions at the current or previous elections. Although I find little evidence to suggest that the potential endogeneity of turnout and voter preferences undermine the findings of my third article, it is important to keep in mind that parties and voters can influence one another in complex ways.

5.5 Future Research

The findings presented in this dissertation have some important implications for the study of representative democracy that open up new questions for future research. These questions relate to the role of partisan attachments in times of increasing electoral volatility and party system fragmentation. I have argued that partisan attachments provide an important basis for the functioning of representative democracy. Not only do partisan attachments help regulate party competition insofar as they incentivise parties to respond to the preferences of their core constituents; they also make voters more receptive to the communications of their preferred parties and thereby limit voters' reliance on static institutional heuristics. Yet recent research by Dalton (2016, 2013) suggests that partisan attachments across Western Europe are being eroded. What is the nature of this apparent decline in partisanship? And if the public's level of partisanship is in decline, what are the consequences for representative democracy and party competition?

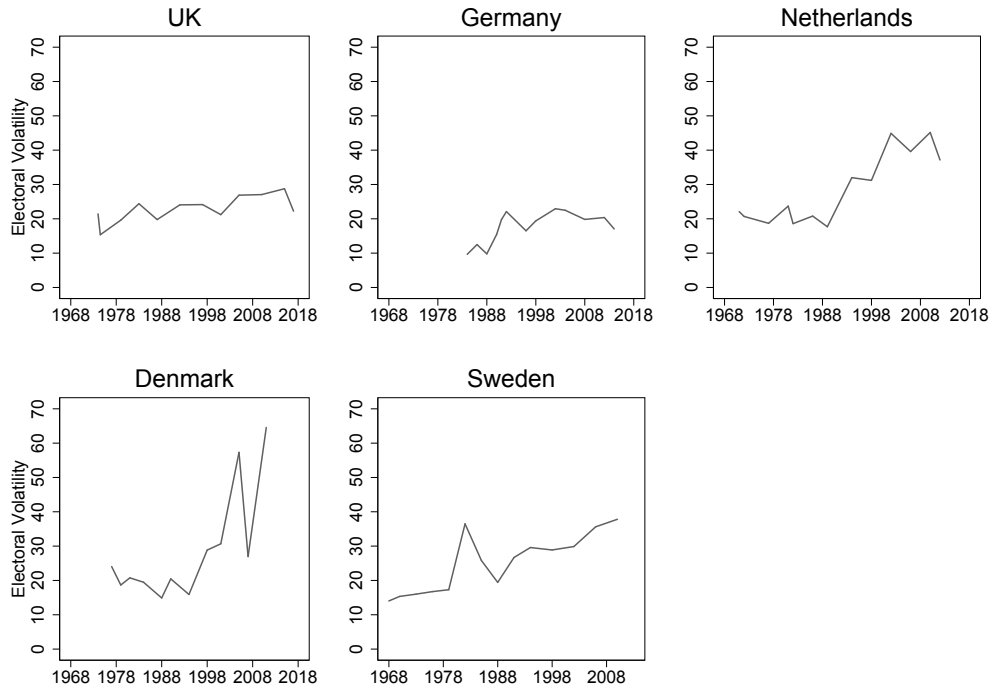
Although research on the decline of partisanship is growing, the nature and magnitude of this decline are contested. On the one hand, there is evidence that electoral volatility has been increasing steadily over the last couple of decades across Western Europe (Dassonneville 2018; Dassonneville and Hooghe 2017). This research measures aggregate electoral volatility using the

Pedersen index, which describes the net percentage of voters who changed their vote (Pedersen 1979). Aggregate measures of electoral volatility, however, can be misleading because they do not track the percentage of individuals who switch their votes between consecutive elections and also do not account for the changing composition of the electorate. Nevertheless, electoral volatility has increased across Europe even when it is measured at the individual level. Figure 5.1 shows that electoral volatility has increased significantly in the Netherlands, Denmark, Germany and Sweden, whereas electoral volatility has been more stable in the United Kingdom. On the other hand, the share of voters who describe themselves as party adherents or sympathisers in figure 5.2 has been remarkably stable in countries like the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, or Denmark, while in Italy and Luxembourg there is some evidence that the share of party adherents has decreased over time.

Partisanship therefore appears to be stable in the sense that the share of respondents who identify with a party has been stable in many countries. But partisanship has declined in the sense that individuals across Western Europe tend to display weaker loyalty towards their party during elections. Future research should continue to question to what extent partisanship is being eroded across Western Europe. Is heightened electoral volatility a sign of declining partisanship, or are we simply witnessing the rise of a different partisan identity, one which is no longer characterised by blind loyalty but by critical loyalty? To what extent are Lavine, Johnston and Steenbergen's (2012) insights into the ambivalent partisan in the United States applicable to West European democracies?

Future research should also examine how the changing nature of partisanship, or its decline, across Western Europe affects representative democracy and

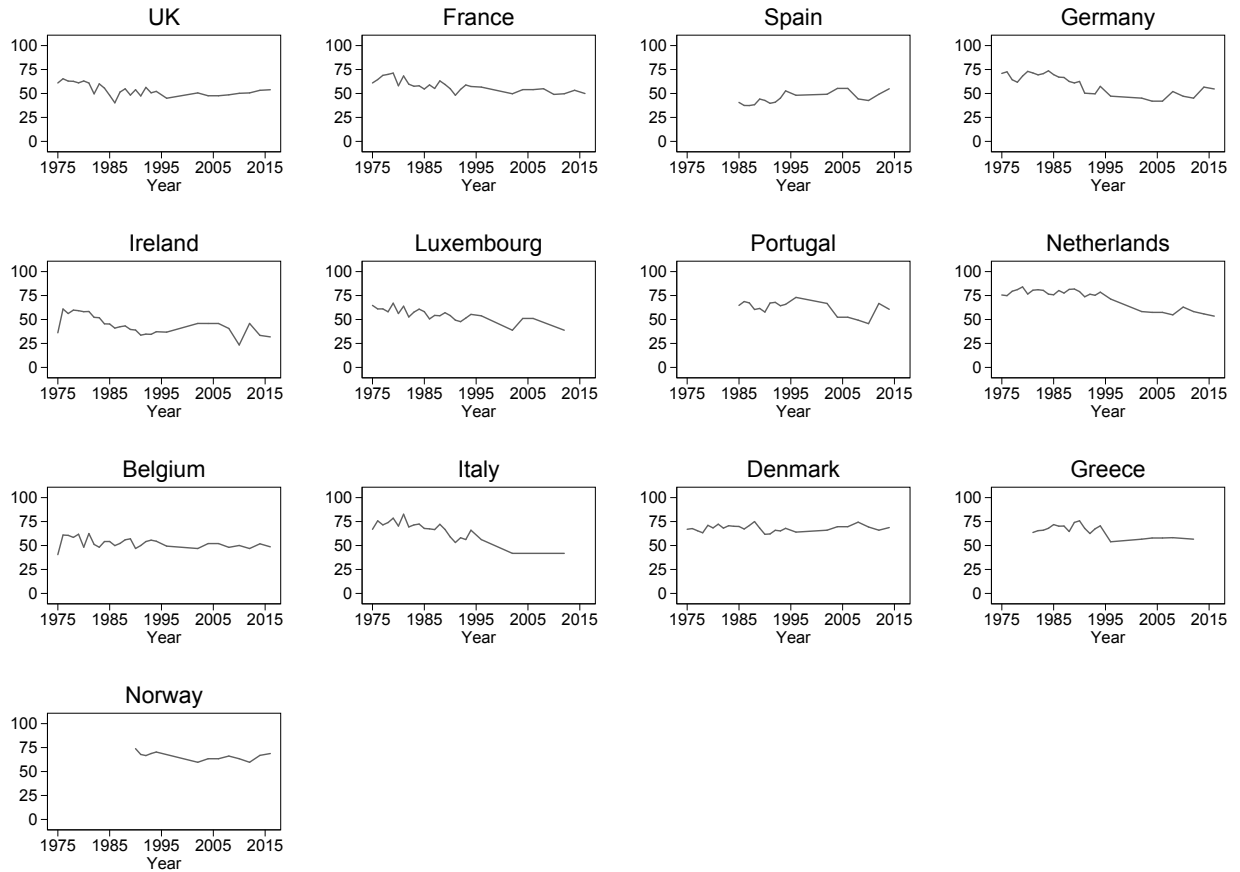
Figure 5.1: Electoral volatility in five West European Countries, 1968-2018



Note: The graph illustrates electoral volatility, which is measured at the individual level, in five West European countries. The data is taken from various election studies.

party competition. Does weaker partisanship lead to party system fragmentation by lowering the barriers of entry for new challenger parties, as de Vries and Hobolt (2020) argue? Or does weaker partisanship reduce parties' incentives to represent a wider range of policy preferences and therefore lower party system polarisation, as my third article or Dassonneville (2018) suggest? These are important questions because previous research finds that party system polarisation is systematically related to satisfaction with democracy (Dassonneville and McAllister 2019; Stecker and Tausendpfund 2016; Ezrow and Xezonakis 2011; Kim 2009), cleavage-based and ideological voting (Evans and Tilley 2012; Dalton 2008; Lachat 2008) and turnout (Dalton 2008; Hobolt and Hoerner 2019).

Figure 5.2: Party attachments in Western Europe, 1975-2017



Note: The graph shows the share of respondents who feel close to a party or are party sympathisers. The data is taken from the Eurobarometer.

Another interesting avenue for future research is to study how the changing nature of partisanship affects the way in which voters interact with parties as well as with one another. I have argued in the first article that partisanship has the power to undermine representative democracy and accountability by leading voters to either uncritically adopt their party's positions as their own or project their own positions onto their party. Partisanship thus distorts the perceived ideological congruence between partisan voters and their representatives, which is considered the basis for a well-functioning democracy (Powell 2000). In this

context, Lavine, Johnston and Steenbergen (2012) note that blind partisan loyalty facilitates bias and leads voters to privilege their partisan attachments over their own material interests and social values in their voting choices. Future research should therefore explore whether the weakening of partisan ties across Western Europe is associated with higher levels of ideological or policy-based voting and lower levels of affective polarisation.

It would also be interesting to explore to what degree declining partisan attachments are being replaced with alternative political identities, and how these identities shape party competition. Recent work by Hobolt, Leeper and Tilley (2018), for example, presents evidence from the United Kingdom that affective polarisation cuts across traditional partisan lines and instead emerges along lines drawn by identification with opinion-based groups. The authors find that in the aftermath of Britain's 2016 referendum on European Union membership pre-existing social divisions, such as age or education, consolidated into salient Brexit identities. These new identities led to affective polarisation by increasing prejudice against the out-group and by exacerbating evaluative biases in perceptions and decision-making. Future research should study the phenomenon of opinion-based identities in different contexts and explore the consequences for parties and governments. How should parties respond to align voters' opinion-based identities with their (previous) partisan identities? What are the consequences for trust in political institutions and the democratic legitimacy of elected representatives if parties fail to capture emerging opinion-based identities?

In this thesis I have provided a framework for addressing these important questions in future research. I have suggested that in order to better understand the dynamic interplay between parties and distinct voter groups,

scholars first need to identify the salient party-based or opinion-based group identities. Scholars should then analyse how these group identities shape voting behaviour, political attitudes and perceptions. Finally, scholars should question how parties can respond via policy or non-policy appeals to represent voters, retain their core constituents, attract new voters, and safeguard political trust and legitimacy. Following this framework in this dissertation has allowed me to improve our knowledge of the links between parties and distinct partisan and non-partisan groups. As such, this dissertation provides an important step forward in the study of representative democracy.

A | Appendix 1

A.1 Coding of the Independent Variables

The urbanisation variable is measured on a scale from one to five, with higher values denoting a more rural background. Regions are divided into North (1), East (2), West (3), and South (4). Social class is coded as follows: upper class (1); upper middle class (2); middle class (3); upper working class (4); working class (5); and unaware (6). Sector of employment distinguishes between public service (1), on a payroll (2), self-employed (3), and other (4). Income is coded in 24 categories, from lower to higher levels of income. Political interest is scored from low (0) to high (4). Age is measured in years. Education is measured on a one to eleven scale, ranging from lower to higher levels of educational attainment. Men are coded as one and women as zero. Religious respondents are coded as one and respondents without a religious denomination are coded as zero. Dummy variables are created to measure non-response to party placements concerning the issues of redistribution and euthanasia. The dummy variables take the value zero if respondents answered either “don’t know party position” or “don’t know party”, and one if respondents located the party on the issue scale.

A.2 Coding of the Dependent Variable

The measure for perceived proximity on redistribution and on euthanasia is created by taking the absolute distance between respondents' own positions and their placements of their preferred party. Respondents' preferences on redistribution of income are scaled from one to seven with "differences in incomes in our country should be increased" and "differences should be decreased" as the most polarised positions. Respondents' preferences on euthanasia are scaled from one to seven with "forbid euthanasia" and "allow euthanasia" as the most polarised positions. Respondents were also asked to place parties on the same scale. Perceived party positions on policy issues are only available for the VVD, the LPF, the CDA, the PvdA, and the D66. The survey did not ask respondents to place smaller parties, such as the GL, the SP, and the CU on redistribution or euthanasia. A respondent is considered a supporter of a given party if he or she indicates adherence to that party, is a member of that party, or intends to vote for that party in the upcoming election.

A.3 DPES survey questions and original response options

Most important political issues

And now I would like to ask you, what do you think are the most important problems in our country?

101 Ethical problems

102 Social relations

103 Abortion

104 Euthanasia
105 Church (religion)
151 Asylum seekers/ Foreigners/Refugees
152 Discrimination/Racism/ Fascism
153 Intolerance/Minorities
201 Bureaucracy
202 Corruption
203 Politics in general
204 Elections/electoral behaviour
251 Crime and violence
252 Safety/Public order (e.g. violence on the street or at the stadium)
253 Drugs
254 Police and Judiciary
301 Economy (General)
302 Government spending
303 Agricultural policy
304 Inflation/Money
305 Poverty
306 Income/Wages
307 Living expenses
308 Class differences
309 Taxes
310 Employment/unemployment
351 European issues
352 International relations
353 War/Peace/Defense

401 Traffic and transport
402 Public transport
403 Town and country planning
451 Health care issues
452 Elderly care
453 Education
501 Energy
502 Environment (pollution)
551 Welfare services in general
552 Housing
553 Youth
601 Overpopulation, population
602 Ageing of population
701 Media/Culture/Recreation
801 Other
901 No problems
996 DK
997 NA
998 DK/NA

Party adherence

Many people think of themselves as adherent to a particular political party, but there are also people who do not think of themselves as an adherent to a political party. Do you think of yourself as an adherent or not as an adherent to a political party? To which party?

- 1 PvdA
- 2 CDA
- 3 VVD
- 4 D66
- 5 GroenLinks
- 6 SGP
- 7 ChristenUnie
- 8 Lijst Pim Fortuyn
- 9 SP
- 10 Centrumdemocraten
- 11 KVP
- 12 ARP
- 13 CHU
- 14 GPV
- 15 RPF
- 16 Other
- 94 Refused to answer
- 95 Dropped
- 96 DK
- 97 NA
- 98 DK/NA

Party membership

Are you a member of a party, or not? Which party are you a member of?

- 1 PvdA

- 2 CDA
- 3 VVD
- 4 D66
- 5 GroenLinks
- 6 SGP
- 7 ChristenUnie (RPF, GPV)
- 8 List Pim Fortuyn
- 9 SP
- 10 Local List
- 11 Other

Previous vote

The previous elections for the Second Chamber were held in [year of previous election]. Did you vote in these elections, or not? For which party did you vote then?

- 1 PvdA
- 2 CDA
- 3 VVD
- 4 D66
- 5 GroenLinks
- 6 GPV
- 7 RPF
- 8 SGP
- 9 Centrumdemocraten
- 10 UNIE 55+

- 11 AOV
- 12 SP
- 13 Other
- 14 DK
- 15 NA
- 17 Blanc

Perceptions of party positions and respondents' positions

Income differences/redistribution

Some people and parties think that the differences in incomes in our country should be increased (at number 1). Others think that these differences should be decreased (at number 7). Of course, there are also people whose opinion is somewhere in between. Where would you place [party] on this line?

And where would you place yourself?

Euthanasia

Now some questions about political affairs that are frequently in the news. When a doctor ends the life of a person at the latter's request, this is called euthanasia. Some people think that euthanasia should be forbidden by law. Others feel that a doctor should always be allowed to end a life, if the patient makes that request. Of course, there are people whose opinions lie somewhere in between.

Suppose that the people (and parties) who think that euthanasia should be

forbidden are at the beginning of this line (at number 1) and the people (and parties) who feel that a doctor should always be allowed to end a life upon a patient's request are at the end of the line (at number 7). I will ask you first to place some political parties on the line. If you have no idea at all which position a party has, then please feel free to say so.

Where would you place the [party] on this line?

And where would you place yourself?

Crime

Now I would like to ask you a question about another problem. People think differently about the way the government fights CRIME and tries to preserve law and order. Some people think that the government is not tough enough, while other people think that the government should be tougher on crime.

At the beginning of this line are the people (and parties) who think that the government is acting too tough on crime (at number 1); at the end of this line are the people (and parties) who think that the government should act tougher on crime (at number 7). I am going to ask you to place the political parties on this line. If you do not know which point of view a party has, feel free to say so.

Where would you place [party] on this line?

And where would you place yourself?

Asylum seekers

Now I would like to talk with you about another problem. Allowing ASYLUM SEEKERS to enter the Netherlands has frequently been in the news during the last few years. Some people think that the Netherlands should allow more asylum seekers than the government currently does. Other people think that the Netherlands should send asylum seekers who are already staying here back to their country of origin. Of course, there are also people whose opinion lies somewhere in between.

At the beginning of this line are the people (and parties) who think that the Netherlands should allow more asylum seekers to enter (at number 1); at the end of the line are the people (and parties) who think that the Netherlands should send back as many asylum seekers as possible (at number 7).

I will ask you first to place some political parties on the line. If you have no idea at all which position a party has, then please feel free to say so.

Where would you place [party] on this line?

And where would you place yourself?

Net annual income of respondents' household

The respondent has been asked to indicate, with the help of categories on a showcard, the level of household income. The interviewer emphasized that the

information provided would remain strictly confidential and that the question referred to the net total income of the household (i.e. the sum of net incomes of all members of the household, including social security, unemployment benefits, etc., after deduction of taxes).

Education

The next question is about your own education. Could you indicate by means of this showcard the highest education for which you received a diploma?

- 1 Elementary
- 2 (Lower) Vocational
- 3 Secondary
- 4 Middle level vocational, higher level secondary
- 5 Higher level vocational, University
- 96 DK
- 97 NA
- 98 DK/NA

Urbanisation

- 1 Very strongly urban
- 2 Strongly urban
- 3 Mildly urban
- 4 Hardly urban
- 5 Not urban

Social Class

One sometimes speaks of the existence of various social classes and groups. If you were to assign yourself to a particular social class, which one would that be?

- 1 Upper class
- 2 Upper middle class
- 3 Middle class
- 4 Upper working class
- 5 Working class
- 96 DK
- 97 NA
- 98 DK/NA
- Region
- 1 North
- 2 East
- 3 West
- 4 South
- 95 Dropped

Employment Sector

Constructed on the basis of differently formulated questions.

- 1 Public service
- 2 Employed - private employer
- 3 Self-employed

4 Other

95 Dropped

97 NA

Political Interest

Are you very interested in political subjects, fairly interested or not interested?

[0 Not interested; 4 Very interested; 96 Don't know; 97 NA]

Religion

Do you consider yourself a member of a particular church or religious community, and if so, which one?

1 Roman Catholic

2 Dutch Reformed

3 Calvinist

4 Islam

5 Protestant Church of the Netherlands

6 Other

7 No religion

96 DK

97 NA

98 DK/NA

A.4 Robustness Checks

Tables

Table A.1: Average vote shares before and after Fortuyn's death

Party	Before	After	Difference
Labour Party (PvdA)	18.33	17.25	-1.08
Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA)	25.77	25.15	-0.62
People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD)	13.97	14.62	+0.65
List Pim Fortuyn (LPF)	9.89	13.16	+3.27
GroenLinks (GL)	11.52	8.48	-3.04
Democrats 66 (D66)	5.44	5.56	+0.12
Christian Union (CU)	5.08	4.09	-0.99
Socialist Party (SP)	6.44	5.85	-0.59
Reformed Political Party (SGP)	1.72	3.22	+1.50

Table A.2: The effect of exposure to Fortuyn's murder on perceived issue distance without controls

	DV: issue distance to the preferred party			
	Unrelated to treatment		Related to treatment	
	Redistribution	Euthanasia	Crime	Immigration
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Post-treatment	-0.109 (0.112)	0.109 (0.137)	-0.164 (0.117)	-0.311*** (0.116)
Right-wing partisan	0.1778 (0.072)	0.499*** (0.089)	-0.256*** (0.075)	-0.207*** (0.075)
Post-treatment x Right-wing partisan	-0.099 (0.138)	-0.358* (0.183)	0.038 (0.137)	-0.232* (0.140)
Intercept	0.884*** (0.0520)	0.938*** (0.062)	1.069** (0.062)	1.155*** (0.061)
SATT: right-wing partisan	-0.209*** (0.098)	-0.249** (0.122)	-0.126* (0.071)	-0.078 (0.079)
SATT: left-wing partisan	-0.109 (0.112)	0.109 (0.137)	-0.164 (0.117)	-0.311*** (0.116)
Controls	X	X	X	X
R-squared	0.01	0.03	0.02	0.01
Observations	1,340	1,345	1,372	1,374

Note: Results are from OLS regressions with robust standard errors in parentheses. CEM is applied to the data to eliminate imbalances for age and urbanisation. All models include no control variables.

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

Table A.3: Treatment effects after excluding LPF supporters

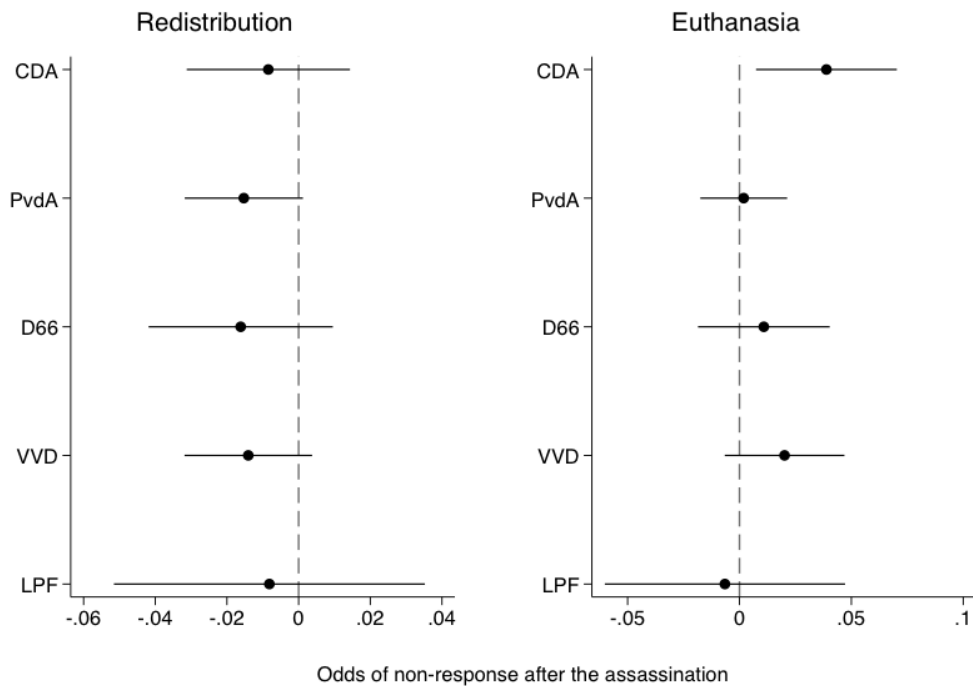
	DV: issue distance to the preferred party			
	Unrelated to treatment		Related to treatment	
	Redistribution	Euthanasia	Crime	Immigration
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Post-treatment	0.001 (0.129)	0.077 (0.133)	-0.102 (0.125)	-0.202 (0.125)
Right-wing partisan	-0.036 (0.161)	1.162*** (0.227)	-0.218* (0.132)	-0.152 (0.164)
Distance on crime	0.072 (0.046)	0.289*** (0.070)		0.186*** (0.053)
Post-treatment x Right-wing partisan	-0.297* (0.162)	-0.379* (0.194)	0.008 (0.155)	0.166 (0.163)
Distance on crime x Right-wing partisan	-0.005 (0.071)	-0.019 (0.094)		-0.034 (0.078)
Intercept	0.942*** (0.155)	1.125*** (0.138)	1.464*** (0.146)	1.51*** (0.169)
SATT: right-wing partisan	-0.296*** (0.099)	-0.302** (0.141)	-0.094 (0.92)	-0.036 (0.104)
SATT: left-wing partisan	0.001 (0.129)	0.077 (0.133)	-0.102 (0.125)	-0.202 (0.125)
Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓
R-squared	0.05	0.13	0.04	0.07
Observations	939	1,066	967	948

Note: Results are from OLS regressions with robust standard errors in parentheses. CEM is applied to the data to eliminate imbalances for age and urbanisation. All models control for previous vote choice, education and gender, while model 1 also controls for income. All models exclude supporters of the LPF.

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

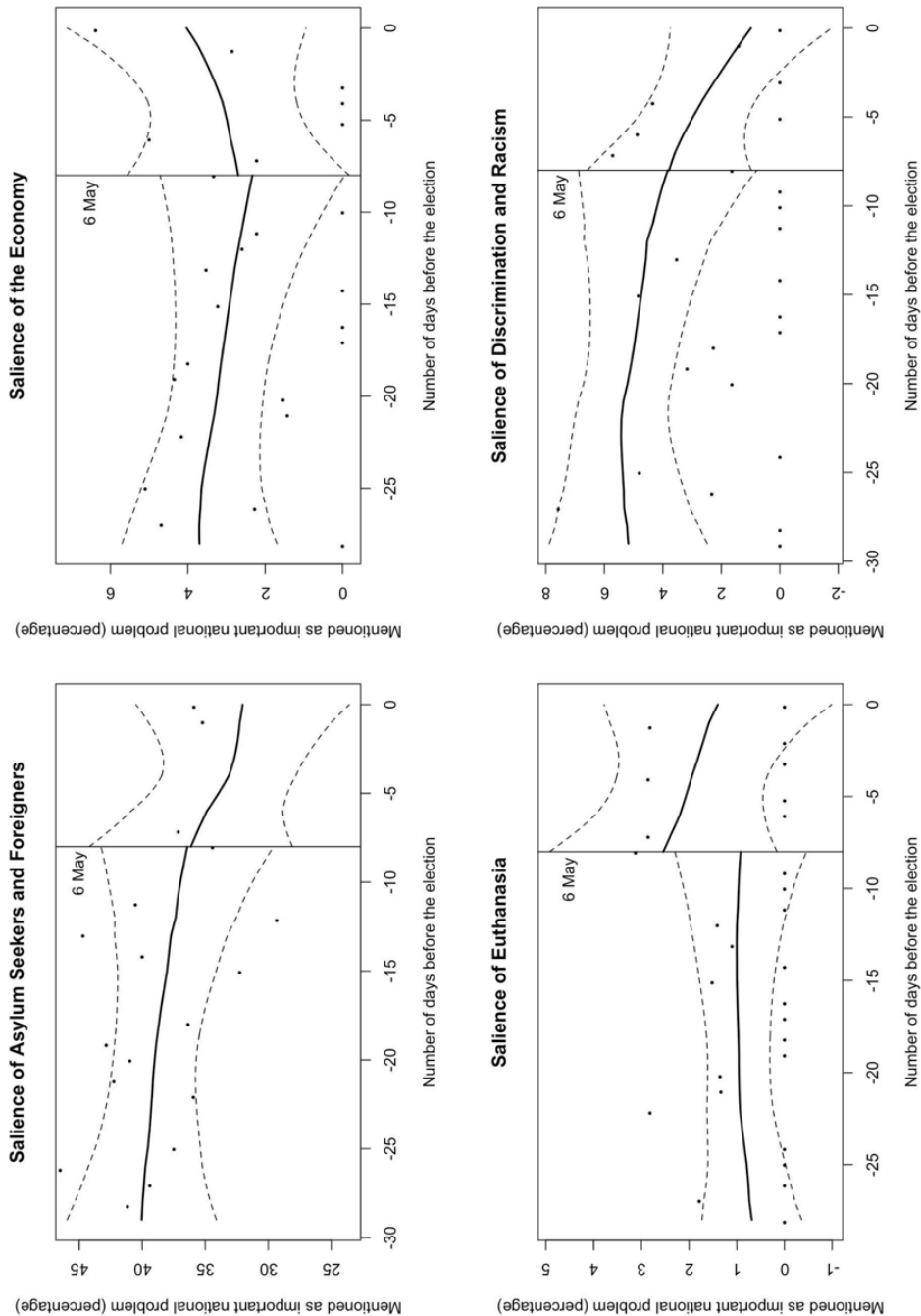
Figures

Figure A.1: Comparing non-responses among the treatment and control groups



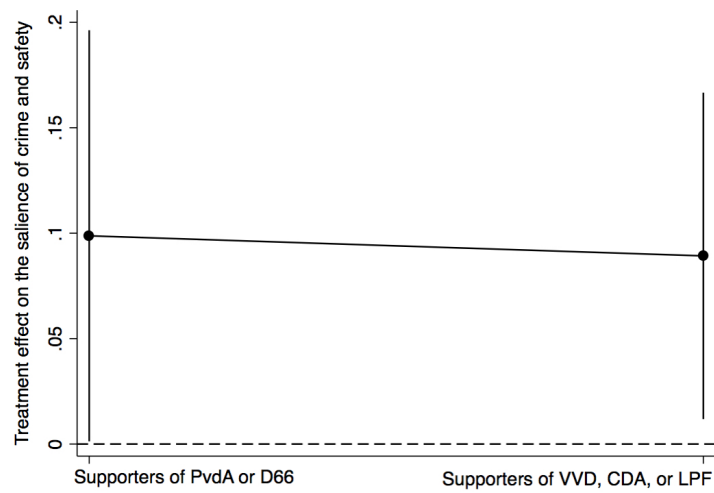
Note: Estimates of the treatment effect on the odds of non-response are based on logistic regressions with all respondents included.

Figure A.2: The salience of different issues before and after Fortuyn's murder



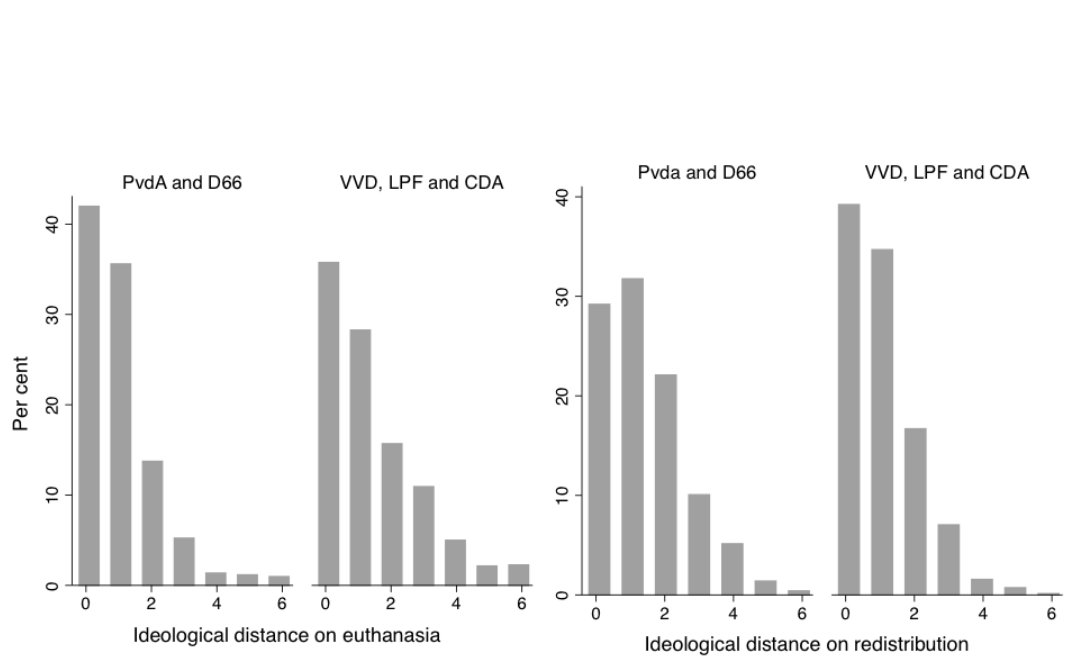
Note: The graphs displays the percentage of respondents who mentioned asylum seeker and foreigners, the economy, discrimination and racism, and euthanasia an important national problem before and after the murder of Pim Fortuyn (6 May 2002). Local regression lines were fitted on either side of the threshold, and 95 per cent confidence intervals are displayed by the dashed lines.

Figure A.3: The salience of crime and safety before and after Fortuyn's murder, by partisan alignment



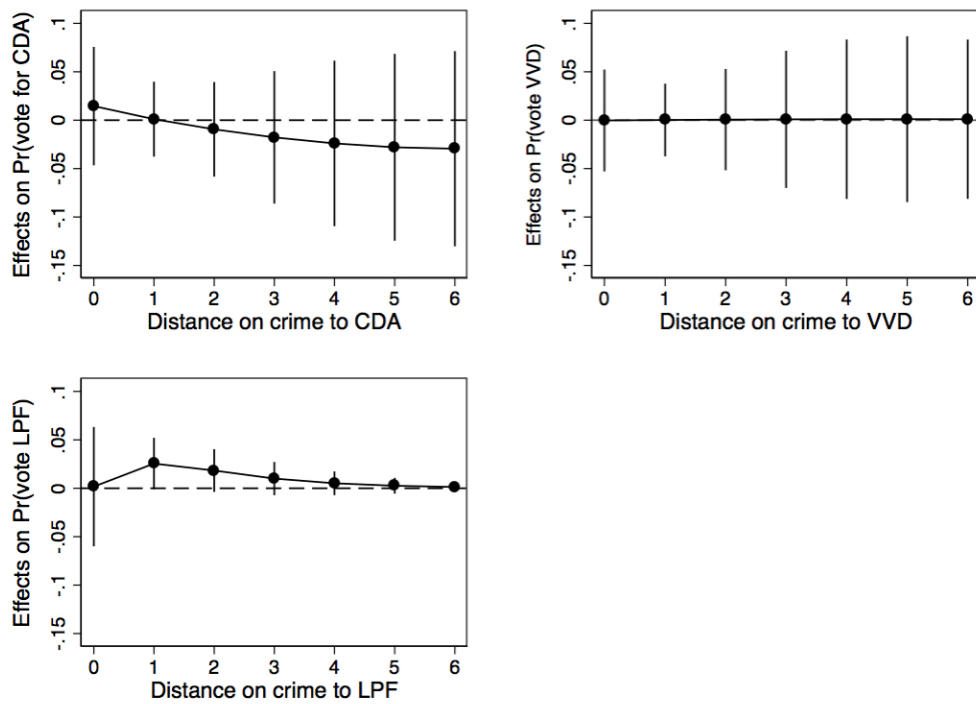
Note: The graph shows the estimated effects of exposure to Fortuyn's murder on the probability of mentioning crime and safety as an important national problem. On the left side the effects are displayed for supporters of the PvdA or the D66, and on the right side the effects are displayed for supporters of the VVD, the CDA, or the LPF. Vertical lines denote 95 per cent confidence intervals.

Figure A.4: The distribution of issue distance on redistribution and euthanasia



Note: The histograms display the distribution of voters' perceived issue distance to their preferred party on redistribution and euthanasia.

Figure A.5: Marginal effects of exposure to Fortuyn's murder on vote intention



Note: The coefficients represent the effect of perceived distance on crime and exposure to Fortuyn's murder on the probability to intend to vote for a given party in the upcoming election.

Figure A.6: Stability of issue positions over time

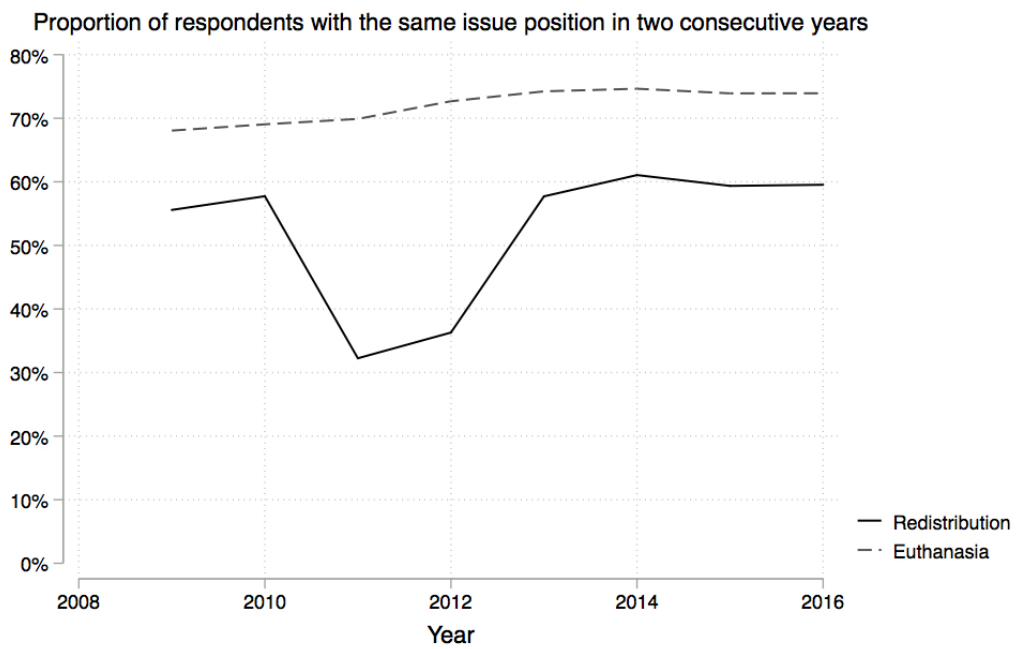
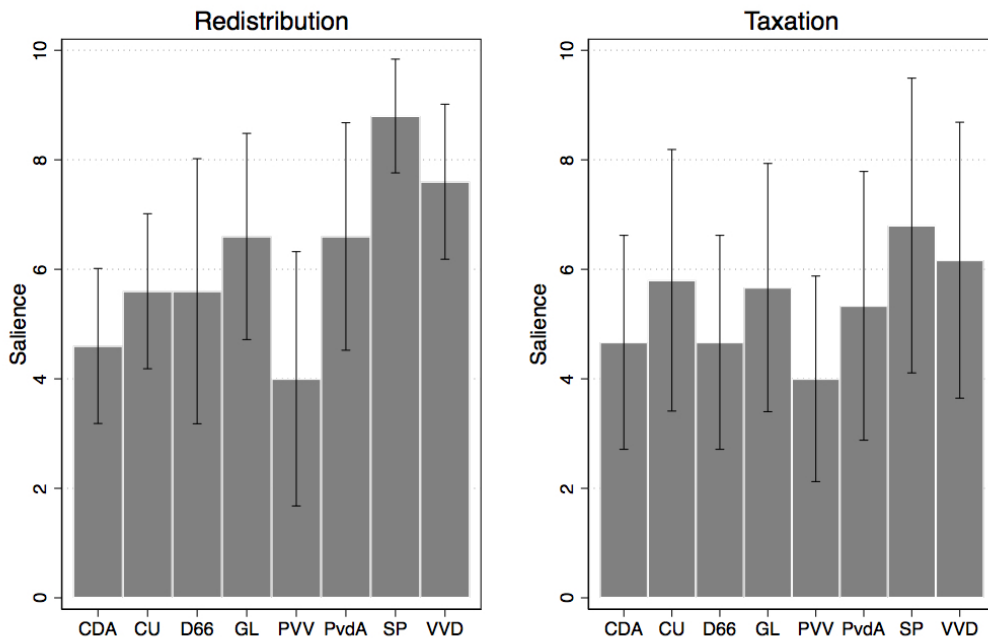


Figure A.7: Associative ownership of redistribution and taxation



Note: The graph displays associative ownership of redistribution and taxation for eight Dutch parties. 95 per cent confidence intervals are denoted by the vertical black lines. The results are based on the 2006 CHES dataset.

B | Appendix 2

B.1 List of Election Studies

Clarke, Harold et al. 2005. British Election Study, 2005: Face-to-Face Survey [computer file]. Colchester, Essex: UK Data Archive [distributor], November 2006.

Clarke, Harold et al. 2005. British Election Study, 2005: Face-to-Face Survey [computer file]. Colchester, Essex: UK Data Archive [distributor], November 2006.

Fieldhouse, Ed, Jane Green, Geoff Evans, Hermann Schmitt, Cess van der Eijk, Jon Mellon and Chris Prosser. 2015. British Election Study Internet Panel Wave 4. DOI: 10.15127/1.293723

Sanders, David, and Paul Whiteley. 2010. British Election Study, 2010: Campaign Internet Data [computer file]. Colchester, Essex: UK Data Archive [distributor], August 2014.

Whiteley, Paul, and David Sanders. 2010. British Election Study, 2010: Face-to-Face Survey [computer file]. Colchester, Essex: UK Data Archive [distributor], August 2014.

B.2 BES survey questions and original response options

Perceptions of parties' position and respondents' positions

European integration

Some people feel that Britain should do all it can to unite fully with the European Union. Other people feel that Britain should do all it can to protect its independence from the European Union. Where would you place yourself and the political parties on this scale? [0 Unite fully with the European Union; 10 Protect our independence; 99999 Don't Know]

Redistribution

Some people feel that government should make much greater efforts to make people's incomes more equal. Other people feel that government should be much less concerned about how equal people's incomes are. Where would you place yourself and the political parties on this scale? [0 Government should try to make incomes equal; 10 Government should be less concerned about equal incomes; 9999 Don't know]

Crime

Some people think that reducing crime is more important than protecting the rights of people accused of committing crimes. Other people think that protecting the rights of accused people is more important than reducing crime. On the 0-10 scale, where would you place yourself on this scale? [0 Reducing crime more important; 10 Rights of accused more important]

Political attention

How much attention do you generally pay to politics? [max 10; min 0]

Party attachment

Many people in Britain feel close to a particular political party for a longer period of time even if they occasionally vote for another party. What about you? In general terms, do you feel attached to a particular political party? And if so, which one?

- 1 Conservative Party
- 2 Labour Party
- 3 Liberal Democrats
- 4 UKIP
- 5 Green Party
- 6 Plaid Cymru
- 7 Scottish National Party
- 7 Other
- 8 None
- 9999 Don't know

Partisan strength

Would you call yourself very strong, fairly strong, or not very strong partisan?

- 1 very strong
- 2 fairly strong
- 3 not very strong
- 9999 Don't know

B.3 Tables

Table B.1: Partisan motivated reasoning and long-term perceptions of policy differences with previous vote choice as a proxy for party ID

DV: Perceived policy distance on				
	Redistribution (1)	Redistribution (2)	European integration (3)	European integration (4)
Extremism	0.379*** (0.008)	0.352*** (0.009)	0.337*** (0.011)	0.305*** (0.014)
Placed between parties	2.907*** (0.033)	2.782*** (0.036)	3.071*** (0.054)	2.874*** (0.064)
Coalition participation	0.299*** (0.0302)	0.133*** (0.037)	0.627*** (0.055)	0.118 (0.070)
Age	—	-0.004*** (0.001)	—	0.002 (0.002)
Gender	—	-0.201*** (0.026)	—	-0.327*** (0.049)
Political attention	—	0.178*** (0.006)	—	0.244*** (0.011)
Coalition partisan	0.001 (0.032)	-0.085*** (0.033)	0.160* (0.085)	-0.032 (0.086)
Coalition participation x Political partisan	0.560*** (0.047)	0.629*** (0.051)	0.540*** (0.096)	0.716*** (0.103)
Intercept	1.059*** (0.023)	0.506*** (0.075)	0.869*** (0.051)	0.053 (0.136)
R-squared	0.23	0.27	0.19	0.24
Respondents	32,709	25,986	13,275	9,152

Note: Robust standard errors are in parentheses. Reference category for coalition partisan: voters who did not vote for one of the coalition parties in the previous election. Models 1 and 2 are based on the 2010 and 2014 BES surveys, while models 3 and 4 are based on the 2005 and 2014 BES surveys.

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

Table B.2: Political attention and the effect of coalition participation

DV: Perceived policy distance on	Redistribution		European integration	
	By party ID	By prev. vote	By party ID	By prev. vote
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(2)
Extremism	0.352*** (0.009)	0.352*** (0.009)	0.312*** (0.013)	0.307*** (0.013)
Placed between parties	2.768*** (0.035)	2.787*** (0.036)	2.898*** (0.062)	2.875*** (0.064)
Coalition participation	-0.058 (0.087)	-0.088 (0.091)	-0.296* (0.138)	-0.243* (0.146)
Coalition partisan	0.170** (0.083)	0.050 (0.084)	0.370** (0.159)	0.030 (0.160)
Age	-0.003*** (0.001)	-0.004*** (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)	0.002 (0.002)
Gender	-0.199*** (0.025)	-0.201*** (0.026)	-0.331*** (0.047)	-0.326*** (0.049)
Political attention	0.169*** (0.009)	0.159*** (0.009)	0.186*** (0.020)	0.169*** (0.020)
Coalition participation x Political partisan:				
Coalition partisans	0.082*** (0.018)	0.096*** (0.017)	0.147*** (0.031)	0.156*** (0.030)
Other voters	0.030** (0.012)	0.033** (0.013)	0.070*** (0.023)	0.071*** (0.024)
Intercept	0.522*** (0.079)	0.615*** (0.083)	0.441*** (0.148)	0.424*** (0.152)
R-squared	0.27	0.27	0.26	0.25
Respondents	27,347	25,986	9,775	9,152

Note: Robust standard errors are in parentheses. Models 1 and 2 are based on the 2010 and 2014 BES surveys, while models 3 and 4 are based on the 2005 and 2014 BES surveys.

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

Table B.3: Homogeneous short-term perceptions of policy differences

DV: Perceived policy distance on	Redistribution		Crime	
	Coalition	Other	Coalition	Other
	partisans	voters	partisans	voters
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(2)
Coalition participation	-0.355*** (0.076)	-0.228*** (0.080)	-0.627*** (0.177)	-0.786*** (0.135)
Extremism	0.165*** (0.049)	0.202*** (0.048)	0.194** (0.096)	0.103 (0.064)
Placed between parties	1.991*** (0.146)	2.600*** (0.199)	2.073*** (0.387)	2.291*** (0.315)
Political attention	0.046 (0.044)	-0.047 (0.041)	-0.160 (0.109)	0.097 (0.065)
Intercept	0.970*** (0.283)	1.323*** (0.240)	2.516*** (0.751)	1.190*** (0.400)
R-squared	0.29	0.25	0.12	0.23
Respondents	1,027	1,348	746	1,020

Note: Robust standard errors are in parentheses. Fixed-effects models are estimated using the 2010 pre- and post-election BES survey.

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

Table B.4: The ideological distance between voters and the coalition parties on redistribution

DV: Perceived distance on redistribution between respondent and coalition parties:						
	Cons partisans		Lib Dem partisans		Other voters	
	Cons	Lib Dems	Cons	Lib Dems	Cons	Lib Dems
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Coalition participation	0.572*** (0.039)	1.833*** (0.061)	1.248*** (0.106)	0.516*** (0.052)	2.257*** (0.046)	1.681*** (0.038)
Age	0.002* (0.001)	0.001 (0.002)	-0.004 (0.003)	0.001 (0.002)	-0.003** (0.002)	0.006*** (0.001)
Gender	-0.084** (0.038)	-0.439*** (0.059)	0.055 (0.096)	-0.138** (0.056)	-0.040 (0.045)	-0.166*** (0.037)
Placed between parties	0.336*** (0.040)	-0.642*** (0.066)	-0.256*** (0.099)	0.516*** (0.052)	-0.826*** (0.053)	-0.255*** (0.039)
Political attention	0.034*** (0.010)	0.238*** (0.015)	0.268*** (0.023)	0.012 (0.014)	0.317*** (0.010)	0.175*** (0.009)
Intercept	0.772*** (0.111)	0.967*** (0.176)	0.686** (0.279)	1.021*** (0.160)	0.383*** (0.126)	0.221** (0.103)
R-squared	0.05	0.18	0.12	0.07	0.22	0.17
Respondents	7,650	7,650	2,682	2,682	17,015	17,015

Note: Robust standard errors are in parentheses. All models are based on the 2010 and 2014 BES surveys.

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

Table B.5: The perceived distance between voters and the coalition parties on EU Integration

	DV: Perceived distance on EU integration between respondent and coalition parties:					
	Cons partisans		Lib Dem partisans		Other voters	
	Cons (1)	Lib Dems (2)	Cons (3)	Lib Dems (4)	Cons (5)	Lib Dems (6)
Coalition participation	0.705*** (0.112)	2.432*** (0.149)	0.222 (0.200)	0.366** (0.173)	1.361*** (0.093)	2.131*** (0.092)
Age	0.018*** (0.003)	0.032*** (0.004)	0.008 (0.006)	0.015*** (0.005)	0.021*** (0.002)	0.034*** (0.003)
Gender	0.122 (0.093)	-0.212* (0.119)	-0.171 (0.176)	0.061 (0.165)	-0.066 (0.075)	-0.364*** (0.084)
Placed between parties	-0.854*** (0.085)	-2.629*** (0.129)	-0.803*** (0.169)	-0.320** (0.152)	-1.755*** (0.072)	-2.058*** (0.077)
Political attention	-0.021 (0.273)	0.322*** (0.033)	0.225*** (0.492)	-0.042 (0.041)	0.155*** (0.019)	0.001 (0.020)
Intercept	1.107*** (0.273)	-0.055 (0.347)	1.499*** (0.492)	1.480*** (0.464)	1.340*** (0.204)	1.417*** (0.224)
R-squared	0.04	0.24	0.06	0.02	0.117	0.14
Respondents	2,792	2,792	807	807	6,176	6,176

Note: Robust standard errors are in parentheses. All models are based on the 2005 and 2014 BES surveys.

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

C | Appendix 3

C.1 Simulation of Scenarios

To illustrate the mechanisms of our hypothesis in figures 2 and 3, I adopt the spatial model developed by Merrill and Adams (2002). I extend the model by including the possibility of abstention from alienation, which is specified by Adams, Merrill, and Grofman's (2005) unified turnout model. For the sake of traceability, I restate the relevant parts of the model and state the equations governing the simulation and the approach of finding vote-maximising party positions.

I assume a one-dimensional policy space (\mathbb{R}) and voters to be normally distributed in this policy space, with 0 being the median voter position. I further assume four parties to position themselves in that policy space by choosing one position only. This means that there is no uncertainty about party positions and parties can neither take several positions nor a range of positions at a given time.

Voting Utilities

In agreement with other research on party competition and voting behaviour, the model assumes that citizens vote for the party that maximises their utility (see Downs 1957; Hinich and Ordeshook 1969; Thurner and Eymann 2000; Plane and Gershtenson 2004). In the Downsian tradition, voters evaluate parties'

policy positions and vote for the party with the smallest ideological distance. In the absence of party attachments the utility voters derive from voting for a given party is therefore defined as

$$u_l(x_i) = -(x_i - y_l)^2$$

where x_i and y_l are the respective policy positions of a voter i and a party l .

I note, however, that this utility function is not the same for all voters. Specifically, some voters have party attachments and gain a non-policy related benefit from voting for their preferred party (Enelow and Hinich 1982; Merrill and Adams 2002; Adams and Merrill 2003; Adams, Merrill, and Grofman 2005). I refer to voters with such party attachments as core constituents. Voters without party attachments are called swing voters.

To account for this characteristic of core constituents, the utility core constituents of a party m derive from voting for a given party l is assumed to be given by

$$u_{l,m}(x_i) = -(x_i - y_l)^2 + \delta_{lm}b_m$$

where, as before, x_i and y_l are the respective policy positions of voter i and party l . However, if party l happens to be the core constituent's own party m , the utility includes a non-policy related partisan bias term b_m . In all other cases, where m and l are different parties, the utility is identical to that of a swing voter.¹ This implies that in the scenarios all core constituents of some party m have the same partisan bias b_m . For the scenarios, I assume $b_1 = b_2 > 0$ and $b_3 = b_4 = 0$. Merrill and Adams (2002) justify the inclusion of core constituents by noting that pure spatial models, which do not account for voters' partisan attachments, cannot explain party dispersion.

¹In the case of $m \neq l$ the Kronecker delta, δ_{lm} , equals 0. For $m = l$ we have $\delta_{lm} = 1$.

In addition, the model includes the possibility of abstention. Following Adams, Merrill, and Grofman (2005), it is assumed that voters derive some utility, u_0 , from abstaining to account for such behaviour. I treat abstention as a pseudo party from which voters derive a constant utility that is independent of their policy position.

Although voters may also abstain because of general apathy or indifference (Adams, Dow, and Merrill 2006; Adams, Merrill, and Grofman 2005; Plane and Gerstenson 2004; Adams and Merrill 2003; Thurner and Eymann 2000), I do not include other reasons of abstention in the model, as my aim is to understand the effect of abstention from alienation.

Voting Probabilities

Voting is assumed to be probabilistic in the sense that the different utilities determine the probability of voting for some party or abstaining. Based on voters' utility functions given above, the probability that a swing voter at some position x , will vote for a given party, l , is given by:²

$$p_l(x) = \frac{\exp(u_l(x))}{\sum_{k=0}^4 \exp(u_k(x))}$$

Similarly, the probability that a core constituent of a party, m , will vote for any party, l , is given by

$$p_{l,m}(x) = \frac{\exp(u_{l,m}(x))}{\sum_{k=0}^4 \exp(u_{k,m}(x))}$$

where x is the core constituent's position in policy space.

Parties' Vote Shares

The model assumes a normal distribution of voters in policy space, which I denote as ϕ . Since the electorate can be divided into different homogeneous

²Note that u_0 is the utility from abstention, which does not depend on the voter's position x . Accordingly, $p_0(x)$ is the probability of abstaining.

groups, I can derive each party's votes for each group separately to obtain a party's total votes. For this I assume that for each group of core constituents of a party, m , a function, ψ_m , gives this group's fraction of the electorate at a given position in policy space; for a position x the density of core constituents of a party m at x is given by $\phi(x) \cdot \psi_m(x)$.

I assume core constituents to be clustered left of the median and right of the median for parties 1 and 2 respectively. The distribution of core constituents of parties 3 and 4 has no importance, as their voting behaviour is identical to that of swing voters. This distribution results in swing voters being clustered around the median. The density of swing voters at a position x is given by:

$$\phi(x) \cdot \left(1 - \sum_{m=1}^4 \psi_m(x)\right)$$

This yields that the expected votes a party, l , receives from the core constituents of some party, m , are given as:

$$E_{l,m} = \int_{\mathbb{R}} \phi(x) \psi_m(x) p_{l,m}(x) dx$$

The expected votes a party, l , receives from swing voters are then given as:

$$E_l = \int_{\mathbb{R}} \phi(x) \left(1 - \sum_{m=1}^4 \psi_m(x)\right) p_l(x) dx$$

Thus, the total expected votes for a party, l , amount to:

$$t_l = E_l + \sum_{m=1}^4 E_{l,m}$$

I assume that every party l tries to maximise its vote share, s_l , as given by:

$$s_l = \frac{t_l}{\sum_{m=1}^4 t_m}$$

Computation of Vote-Maximising Positions

Parties are assumed to maximise their vote share by gradually changing their policy positions. I therefore adopt a dynamic (i.e. time-dependent) approach to find parties' vote-maximising positions, whereby parties change their position in the direction that increases their vote share.

This approach allows me to compare vote-maximising positions in the different scenarios since I use the positions of one scenario as the initial positions for the computation of the vote-maximising positions in the other scenario. I thus simulate the parties' reactions to a change in the model parameters, such as an increase in the ideological polarisation of the electorate. I use positions close to the median of the electorate as initial positions at time t_0 in the first scenario.

More precisely, I assume that each party l starts at an initial position $x_l(t_0)$ at time t_0 and changes its position $x_l(t)$ to increase its vote share, satisfying the following equation:

$$\frac{d}{dt}x_l(t) = \frac{\partial}{\partial x_l}s_l(x_l(t), \mathbf{x}_{-l}(t))$$

where $\mathbf{x}_{-l}(t)$ denotes the positions of all parties except party l at time t .

Note that, if it exists, then the time limit \mathbf{x}^* of $\mathbf{x}(t)$ as $t \rightarrow \infty$ implies for each l that:

$$\frac{\partial}{\partial x_l}s_l(x_l(t), \mathbf{x}_{-l}(t)) = \frac{d}{dt}x_l(t) \rightarrow 0$$

Furthermore, given x_l^* is neither a saddle point nor a minimal point,

$$\frac{\partial}{\partial x_l}s_l(x_l^*, \mathbf{x}_{-l}^*) = 0$$

implies that a party l cannot increase its vote share by deviating from its current position x_l^* , thus having maximised its vote share. Therefore, x_l^* is a vote

maximising position for each party l . To arrive at the parties' vote maximising positions, I thus compute the time limit \mathbf{x}^* of $\mathbf{x}(t)$ starting from initial party positions $\mathbf{x}(t_0)$. I prevent the process from being stuck at saddle points by using finite differences as an approximation for $\frac{\partial}{\partial x_l} s_l(x_l(t), \mathbf{x}_{-l}(t))$. I also make sure that the initial positions are not minimum points of the respective s_l .

This procedure generates the scenarios, in which voter polarisation is varied by changing the variance of ϕ and the propensity to abstain is varied by changing u_0 . All other values are held constant.

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C.3 Eurobarometer survey questions and original response options

Left-right self placement

In political matters people talk of "the left" and "the right". How would you place your views on this scale? [ten-point-scale: 0 left; 10 right]

C.4 Descriptive Statistics and Robustness Checks

Table C.1: Descriptive statistics of dataset

Variable	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Observations
Party extremism	0.694	0.533	0.004	3.590	695
Voter polarisation	2.048	0.194	1.560	2.598	733
Voter turnout	78.825%	9.169%	55.40%	93.37%	733
Effective number of parties	4.480	1.190	2.55	7.61	733
Electoral disproportionality	5.613	4.919	0.41	25.25	733
PM party	14.73%	35.469%	0%	100%	733
Party system dispersion	0.668	0.319	0.100	1.419	114

Table C.2: Turnout in eleven Western European countries, 1977-2018

	Model 1	Model 2
Turnout _{t-1}		0.947*** (0.047)
Party system dispersion _{t-1}	1.169 (2.154)	0.448 (1.107)
Polarization _{t-1}	2.518 (3.025)	-2.010 (1.800)
Disproportionality _{t-1}	-0.201 (0.168)	-0.085 (0.111)
Effective number of parties _{t-1}	-0.938 (0.558)	0.173 (0.358)
Constant	77.832*** (6.074)	6.614 (5.029)
Lagged dependent variable		Yes
Country fixed effects	Yes	
Decade fixed effects	Yes	
R-squared: within	0.422	
R-squared: between	0.281	
R-squared: overall	0.223	0.841
Observations	106	106

Note: p* < 0.10, p** < 0.05, p*** < 0.01, two-tailed tests.
Robust standard errors in parentheses. Panel-corrected standard errors in model 2.

Table C.3: Estimating effects of polarisation and turnout using a Prais-Winsten transformation

	DV: Party extremism	DV: Party system dispersion
Turnout _{t-1}	0.094*** (0.035)	0.090** (0.039)
Polarization _{t-1}	4.143*** (1.405)	3.494** (1.614)
Disproportionality _{t-1}	-0.001 (0.013)	-0.011 (0.012)
PM party _{t-1}	-0.219*** (0.044)	
Effective number of parties _{t-1}	0.021 (0.034)	0.063 (0.042)
Polarisation _{t-1} × Turnout _{t-1}	-0.049*** (0.018)	-0.041** (0.020)
Constant	-7.429*** (2.731)	-6.876** (3.164)
Country fixed effects	✓	✓
R-squared	0.199	0.552
Observations	695	102

Note: p* < 0.10, p** < 0.05, p*** < 0.01, two-tailed tests. Table entries are Prais-Winsten regression coefficients correcting for panel-specific autocorrelation in error terms over one period (AR1) with panel-corrected standard errors in parentheses and country dummies.

Table C.4: Determinants of party extremism with low and high electoral disproportionality

	High disproportionality			Low disproportionality		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Party extremism _{t-1}			0.443*** (0.107)			0.473*** (0.097)
Turnout _{t-1}	0.148*** (0.037)	0.145** (0.066)	0.098* (0.055)	0.160** (0.064)	0.078 (0.048)	0.128* (0.070)
Polarisation _{t-1}	5.642*** (1.287)	5.835** (2.323)	3.513* (1.839)	7.804** (2.892)	3.943* (2.112)	5.027* (2.934)
Disproportionality _{t-1}	-0.002 (0.013)	-0.007 (0.012)	0.005 (0.006)	0.041* (0.020)	-0.003 (0.029)	0.023 (0.020)
PM party _{t-1}	-0.141 (0.095)	0.007 (0.087)	-0.064 (0.060)	-0.282*** (0.053)	-0.120 (0.076)	-0.163*** (0.060)
Effective number of parties _{t-1}	0.006 (0.040)	0.027 (0.054)	0.044 (0.027)	0.027 (0.038)	0.081* (0.045)	0.076** (0.034)
Polarisation _{t-1} × Turnout _{t-1}	-0.076*** (0.018)	-0.077** (0.033)	-0.046* (0.026)	-0.091** (0.035)	-0.045* (0.025)	-0.060* (0.036)
Constant	-10.183*** (2.733)	-10.264** (4.678)	-7.304* (3.875)	-12.912** (5.210)	-6.174 (3.953)	-10.732* (5.792)
Lagged dependent variable			✓			✓
Country fixed effects	✓			✓		
Party fixed effects		✓			✓	
Decade fixed effects	✓	✓		✓	✓	
R-squared: within	0.064	0.079		0.125	0.081	
R-squared: between	0.065	0.007		0.151	0.219	
R-squared: overall	0.015	0.011	0.274	0.021	0.106	0.347
Observations	291	291	235	404	404	365

Note: p* < 0.10, p** < 0.05, p*** < 0.01, two-tailed tests. Robust standard errors in parentheses. Panel-corrected standard errors in models 3 and 6. High disproportionality is above the mean level of 5.613.

Table C.5: Determinants of party system dispersion with low and high electoral disproportionality

	High disproportionality		Low disproportionality	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Party extremism _{t-1}		0.220 (0.163)		0.584*** (0.133)
Turnout _{t-1}	0.185*** (0.045)	0.150** (0.064)	0.081 (0.064)	0.101* (0.059)
Polarisation _{t-1}	6.941*** (1.823)	5.022** (2.176)	4.130 (2.836)	4.203* (2.425)
Disproportionality _{t-1}	-0.008 (0.017)	0.012* (0.007)	0.026 (0.027)	0.023 (0.019)
Effective number of parties _{t-1}	0.026 (0.022)	0.021 (0.038)	0.091 (0.067)	0.075** (0.035)
Polarisation _{t-1} × Turnout _{t-1}	-0.093*** (0.024)	-0.067** (0.030)	-0.047 (0.035)	-0.048 (0.029)
Constant	-13.004*** (3.297)	-10.886** (4.612)	-6.817 (5.061)	-8.854* (4.850)
Lagged dependent variable		✓		✓
Country fixed effects	✓		✓	
Decade fixed effects	✓		✓	
R-squared: within	0.379		0.310	
R-squared: between	0.014		0.097	
R-squared: overall	0.379	0.334	0.051	0.536
Observations	45	45	57	57

Note: p* < 0.10, p** < 0.05, p*** < 0.01, two-tailed tests. Robust standard errors in parentheses. Panel-corrected standard errors in models 2 and 4. High disproportionality is above the mean level of 5.613.

Table C.6: Determinants of party extremism with low and high average turnout

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Party extremism _{t-1}			0.501*** (0.083)
Turnout _{t-1}	0.052 (0.029)	0.036* (0.020)	0.101** (0.048)
Polarisation _{t-1}	2.873* (1.309)	2.100** (0.858)	3.786** (1.643)
Disproportionality _{t-1}	0.007 (0.017)	0.000 (0.010)	0.006 (0.005)
PM party _{t-1}	-0.224*** (0.055)	-0.071 (0.061)	-0.065 (0.044)
Effective number of parties _{t-1}	0.022 (0.020)	0.017 (0.032)	-0.017 (0.044)
Average turnout		0.047* (0.026)	0.084 (0.052)
Average turnout x Polarisation t-1 x Turnout t-1	-0.0004* (0.0002)	-0.0003** (0.0001)	-0.0007** (0.0003)
Constant	-3.831 (2.444)	-5.825* (3.495)	-13.174* (6.887)
Lagged dependent variable			Yes
Country fixed effects	Yes	Yes	
Party fixed effects			
Decade fixed effects	Yes	Yes	
R-squared: within	0.06	0.060	
R-squared: between	0.056	.001	
R-squared: overall	0.014	0.008	0.425
Observations	695	695	600
Note: p* < 0.10, p** < 0.05, p*** < 0.01, two-tailed tests. Robust standard errors in parentheses. Panel-corrected standard errors in model 3.			

Table C.7: Effects of changes in polarisation and turnout on changes in party extremism

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Change in party extremism _{t-1}		-0.467*** (0.082)	
Change in turnout _{t-1}	-0.003 (0.007)	-0.007 (0.004)	-0.005 (0.005)
Change in polarisation _{t-1}	-0.027 (0.146)	0.067 (0.252)	0.046 (0.253)
Disproportionality _{t-1}	0.009 (0.009)	-0.002 (0.004)	0.003 (0.012)
PM party _{t-1}	0.010 (0.034)	-0.023 (0.053)	0.030 (0.068)
Effective number of parties _{t-1}	0.012 (0.032)	-0.010 (0.020)	0.018 (0.041)
Change in polarisation _{t-1} x Change in turnout _{t-1}	0.012 (0.050)	-0.045 (0.057)	0.057 (0.050)
Constant	-0.092 (0.132)	0.042 (0.100)	-0.073 (0.150)
Lagged dependent variable		Yes	
Country fixed effects	Yes		Yes
Party fixed effects			Yes
Decade fixed effects	Yes		
R-squared: within	0.012		0.024
R-squared: between	0.066		0.043
R-squared: overall	0.007	0.219	0.008
Observations	540	479	540
Note: p* < 0.10, p** < 0.05, p*** < 0.01, two-tailed tests. Robust standard errors in parentheses. Panel-corrected standard errors in model 2.			

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